FROM IMPERMANENCE TO FREEDOM

Ethical Leadership Formation in University Administration through Salok Mahalla 9

Dr. Kawal Jeet Singh

Dedicated to my grandson,

Arjav Partap Singh Chaudhary

Your arrival filled our lives with joy and hope.
In the quiet days awaiting your birth,
this book slowly took shape.

May you grow with curiosity, wisdom,
and the courage to explore the world.

Preface

Guru Tegh Bahadur, the Ninth Guru in the Sikh tradition, stands in history as the embodiment of moral courage, spiritual depth, and uncompromising ethical clarity. His martyrium in 1675 in Delhi, offered in defence of the religious freedom of Kashmiri Hindus, remains one of the most profound affirmations of conscience in world history. He did not sacrifice his life for sectarian expansion, but for the protection of the freedom of belief itself. His martyrdom transformed spiritual conviction into civilizational responsibility. Among his enduring contributions are the fifty-seven Saloks—known as *Salok Mahalla 9*—enshrined within the Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Positioned toward the concluding portion of the scripture, these Saloks distil existential insight, ethical sobriety, and spiritual resolution into compact yet profound aphoristic reflections. They are neither ornamental devotional verses nor isolated doctrinal fragments; they are concentrated articulations of human finitude, illusion, discernment, and liberation.

For many years, I have been deeply fascinated by these fifty-seven Saloks. Their brevity conceals immense depth; their poetic restraint contains profound existential diagnosis. I have repeatedly encountered in them not only spiritual insight but a structured orientation toward leadership formation. The Saloks seem to move deliberately—from confronting impermanence to exposing illusion, from cultivating discernment to anchoring freedom. In this progression, I perceived a leadership theory that is neither managerial nor procedural, but existential and ethical. In an era when Universities and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) struggle with instability, performative governance, and crisis-driven administration, these Saloks offer a remarkably coherent architecture for sustainable leadership. This book emerges from that long-standing engagement, reflection, and reverence.

Methodologically, this work adopts a thematic–ethical and hermeneutic approach. While I remain deeply attentive to each of the fifty-seven Saloks, this study does not examine them independently in isolation. Instead, it classifies them into interconnected thematic clusters that together reveal a pedagogical progression. The analysis identifies four converging ethical themes—Kaal, Māyā, Bibek/Vairāg, and Naam—forming what may be described as a pedagogical funnel rather than a random distribution of aphorisms. The Saloks first front-load existential diagnosis, then demonstrate the distortions that arise from illusion, subsequently cultivate ethical capacity through discernment and detachment, and finally culminate in ontological anchoring through Naam. This integrative reading seeks to illuminate the internal coherence of *Salok Mahalla 9* without reducing its theological depth.

At the heart of this study lies Gurmat ontology and its implications for leadership formation within Universities and HEIs. Gurmat presents an existential anthropology that recognizes human finitude, vulnerability, and egoic inclination. Leadership, within this ontology, is not merely positional authority but interior formation. Ontological anchoring—alignment with enduring truth rather than transient prestige—becomes foundational. Ethics, therefore, is not

external compliance or regulatory adherence; it is formative transformation. Leadership failure is not primarily administrative incompetence but anthropological instability. Sustainable institutional integrity arises when leadership is shaped by interior clarity rather than external performance.

The first major movement of the book explores existential diagnosis. Through Kaal, the Saloks confront impermanence and the fear that silently shapes leadership behaviour. Existential insecurity manifests in crisis governance, reactive decision-making, and temporal anxiety. Leaders attached to permanence in a transient world govern defensively. Complementing this is Māyā, which exposes ethical distortion within institutional life. Prestige fixation, performative compliance, and the illusion of control distort governance structures. Together, Kaal and Māyā reveal that institutional instability is not accidental; it emerges from leadership formed without existential clarity.

The second major movement addresses ethical formation. Bibek and Vairāg cultivate discernment and detachment, enabling moral vigilance, ego relativization, and genuine ethical capacity formation. Here leadership begins to stabilize—not through power consolidation but through interior discipline. The culmination is Naam, which provides ontological anchoring and moral freedom. Interior steadiness replaces reactive fear; non-performative integrity replaces reputational anxiety; institutional legitimacy emerges not from image management but from authentic alignment. In this culmination, leadership becomes free—not free from responsibility, but free from ego-driven distortion.

The final part of this book turns toward institutional application. It translates the ethical architecture of *Salok Mahalla 9* into leadership formation frameworks for Higher Education Institutions. This section develops training architectures that foreground interior formation, presents comparative models aligning Gurmat insights with contemporary leadership challenges, and proposes measurement frameworks that privilege ethical stability over performative metrics. It further examines the movement from institutional collapse to coherence, arguing that organizational failure is best understood as anthropological misformation rather than mere administrative breakdown. Through integrative synthesis, the Gurmat Leadership Architecture is articulated as a coherent model in which ethical governance, academic freedom, and institutional trust emerge from well-formed leadership rather than imposed regulation.

The book ultimately moves toward articulating a theory of ethical leadership formation rooted in Gurmat ontology. Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib does not govern through fear—neither by threats of punishment nor by promises of reward. There is no reliance on heaven and hell as instruments of control. Instead, his Saloks patiently educate the human condition: Kaal cultivates existential sobriety, Māyā exposes illusion, Bibek and Vairāg form ethical capacity, and Naam anchors moral freedom. Together, they offer a leadership pedagogy capable of forming University administration not through coercion or compliance, but through clarity, steadiness, and integrity. It is my hope that this work contributes, however modestly, to

reimagining leadership in Higher Education as an ethical vocation grounded in interior formation and enduring truth.

The reflections offered in this volume represent my own perception, intellectual engagement, and deeply held convictions shaped through prolonged contemplation of *Salok Mahalla 9*. While grounded in Sikh scriptural thought and informed by leadership theory, the interpretations advanced here remain my personal synthesis rather than an authoritative doctrinal claim. This work does not seek to impose a singular reading but to present a conceptual framework that I believe emerges coherently from the Saloks. Any limitations, emphases, or interpretive extensions are solely my responsibility.

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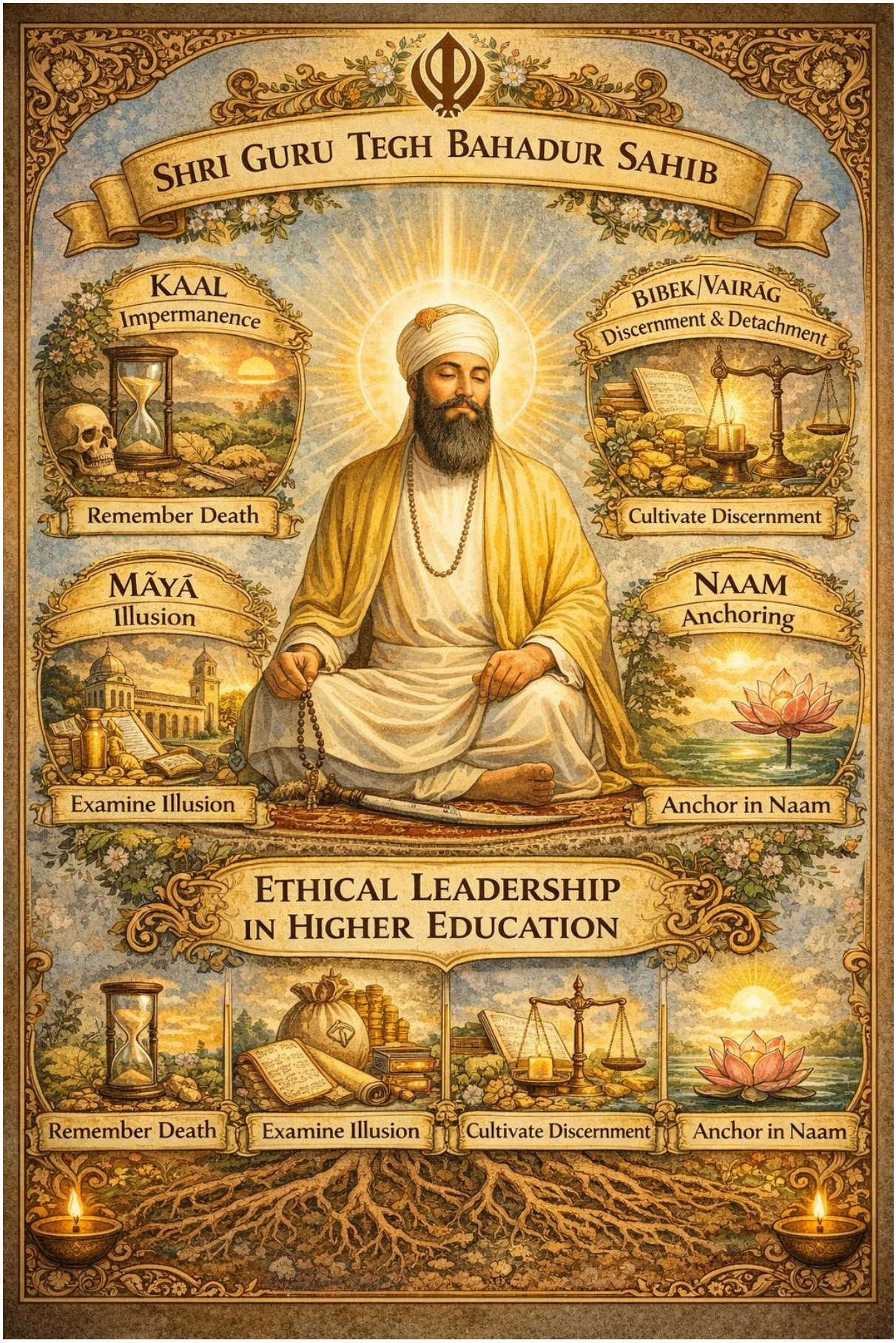
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Examine Illusion
NAAM
Anchoring
Anchor in Naam
Ethical Leadership
in Higher Education
Remember Death
Examine Illusion
Cultivate Discernment
Anchor in Naam

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Part I

Foundations

From Existential Diagnosis to Ethical Formation

The opening part of this book, **Foundations**, establishes the conceptual, philosophical, and ontological ground upon which the entire study rests. It prepares the reader to encounter *Salok Mahalla 9* not merely as a collection of devotional aphorisms, but as a carefully structured ethical pedagogy with profound implications for leadership formation. Before leadership practices, governance models, or institutional outcomes can be meaningfully discussed, a deeper question must be addressed: **How is ethical capacity formed in the first place?**

The two chapters that constitute this foundational part respond to that question by returning to first principles—human finitude, illusion, discernment, and inner anchoring—articulated through the Saloks of **Guru Tegh Bahadur**, as preserved in the **Sri Guru Granth Sahib**. Together, they argue that leadership failure and institutional instability are rarely procedural accidents. They are, more often, the outward manifestation of unresolved existential and ontological misalignment.

Foundations as Orientation, Not Prescription

This section does not begin with techniques, competencies, or leadership toolkits. Instead, it offers orientation. *Foundations* invites the reader to step back from the urgency of institutional problem-solving and to consider the deeper architecture of ethical formation itself. In doing so, it challenges dominant assumptions that ethics can be secured primarily through compliance regimes, policy proliferation, or external enforcement.

Within the Gurmat worldview, ethics is not an external imposition upon an otherwise neutral subject. It is a **formed capacity**, cultivated through sustained engagement with reality as it is—impermanent, unstable, and resistant to egoic control. Leadership, therefore, is understood first as an *ontological condition* before it becomes a managerial function. The foundational chapters situate leadership within this deeper register, where courage, steadiness, and moral clarity arise not from authority or position, but from inner alignment.

Chapter 1: Salok Mahalla 9 as Ethical Pedagogy

The first chapter establishes the methodological and philosophical scaffolding of the study. It argues that *Salok Mahalla 9* functions as an integrated ethical curriculum rather than a random anthology of spiritual reflections. Through a thematic–ethical and hermeneutic approach, the

chapter demonstrates that the fifty-seven Saloks disclose an internal coherence—a pedagogical funnel—that moves deliberately from existential diagnosis to ethical stabilization.

Rather than examining each Salok in isolation, the chapter justifies a thematic clustering that reveals a patterned progression:

- **Impermanence (Kaal)** confronts human finitude and destabilizes false security.
- **Illusion (Māyā)** exposes the psychological and ethical distortions that arise when permanence is falsely assumed.
- **Discernment and detachment (Bibek and Vairāg)** cultivate ethical readiness and restraint under pressure.
- **Naam** provides ontological anchoring and moral freedom beyond fear and loss.

This chapter clarifies why a purely atomistic or philological reading would obscure the ethical architecture embedded in the corpus. The Saloks, read cumulatively, function as a pedagogy of formation—training consciousness to meet reality without illusion and to act without dependence on outcome assurance. The chapter thus lays the groundwork for understanding ethics not as rule-following, but as assimilated moral capacity.

Chapter 2: Gurmat Ontology and Leadership Formation

Building upon the diagnostic and pedagogical framework established in Chapter 1, the second chapter turns explicitly to leadership formation, particularly within universities and Higher Education Institutions. Here, the discussion shifts from textual architecture to ontological implication. The question is no longer *what the Saloks say*, but *what kind of leader they form*. Chapter 2 introduces a Gurmat ontology of leadership grounded in existential anthropology. Human beings are understood as finite, vulnerable, and prone to egoic attachment. When impermanence is denied and Māyā governs perception, leadership predictably becomes fear-driven, performative, and ethically fragile. Institutional collapse, in this view, is not anomalous; it is the applied manifestation of unformed consciousness.

Conversely, when impermanence is accepted and illusion discerned, leadership formation takes a different trajectory. Ethics emerges as formation rather than compliance. Discernment enables clarity under pressure; detachment frees action from reputational anxiety; Naam anchors integrity beyond gain and loss. Leadership becomes capable of ethical action without assurance—precisely the capacity most required in moments of institutional crisis.

This chapter therefore reframes leadership ethics as an interior discipline rather than an external constraint. It argues that sustainable governance, academic freedom, and institutional trust arise not from intensified regulation, but from leaders formed in existential clarity and ontological steadiness.

The Unifying Logic of Foundations

Taken together, the two chapters of *Foundations* perform a single, coherent task: they reposition ethics at the level of being rather than behaviour. Chapter 1 diagnoses the human condition and reveals the ethical pedagogy embedded within *Salok Mahalla 9*. Chapter 2 translates that pedagogy into an ontology of leadership formation, showing how existential clarity precedes ethical resilience.

This foundational movement is intentional. The book does not rush toward application without first establishing ground. By the end of this section, the reader is equipped with a conceptual lens through which subsequent analyses can be understood:

- Leadership failure is existential before it is institutional.
- Ethics is formed through confrontation with impermanence and illusion.
- Compliance without ontological anchoring remains fragile.
- Inner freedom, not external control, sustains integrity.

Preparing the Reader for What Follows

Foundations thus functions as both orientation and invitation. It invites the reader—especially those engaged in leadership, governance, and institutional responsibility—to reconsider where ethical strength truly originates. It also prepares the conceptual ground for the chapters that follow, where this ethical architecture will be further elaborated, applied, and synthesized.

The journey of this book begins, appropriately, not with answers, but with formation. Before institutions can be stabilized, consciousness must be. Before leadership can govern ethically, it must first be grounded ontologically.

This is the work of *Foundations.*

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Chapter 1

Salok Mahalla 9 as Ethical Pedagogy

Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib, the Ninth Guru in the Sikh tradition, stands in history as the embodiment of moral courage, spiritual depth, and uncompromising ethical clarity. His martyr in 1675 in Delhi, undertaken to defend the religious freedom of Kashmiri Hindus, is celebrated not merely as an act of personal sacrifice but as a luminous affirmation of conscience itself. Unlike warriors of conquest or proponents of sectarian expansion, Guru Tegh Bahadur offered his life for the principle of freedom of belief, elevating spiritual conviction to a dimension of civilizational responsibility. This singular act exemplifies the inseparability of ethics, faith, and social conscience in Sikh thought.

Among his enduring contributions to the spiritual and ethical corpus of Sikhism are the fifty-seven Saloks, collectively known as Salok Mahalla 9, enshrined within the Sri Guru Granth Sahib. These Saloks occupy a unique position in the scripture, appearing just prior to the Mandavani, the final poetic summation of Guru Arjan Dev Ji's composition. Their placement is deliberate: they serve as a bridge between the doctrinal culmination of the Granth and the concluding exhortations, distilling ethical reflection, spiritual insight, and existential meditation into concise yet profound aphorisms.

The Saloks are neither ornamental devotional verses nor isolated doctrinal fragments. They are compact ethical treatises, each articulating the human condition with remarkable clarity: the brevity of life, the pervasiveness of illusion (Maya), the necessity of discernment and detachment (Vivek/Bairag), and the transformative power of Divine remembrance (Naam). Together, these fifty-seven aphorisms form a pedagogical architecture of ethical consciousness, offering readers guidance on how to navigate the challenges of mortality, moral choice, and spiritual aspiration.

By presenting these teachings in succinct, aphoristic form, Guru Tegh Bahadur emphasizes that ethical awareness is not merely theoretical reflection but a practical, lived discipline. Each Salok functions as a mirror for introspection, inviting readers to examine the impermanence of worldly attachments, the distortions of ego, and the liberating potential of mindfulness and devotion. In doing so, Salok Mahalla 9 lays the ethical foundation for the entire spiritual and moral vision of the Sri Guru Granth Sahib, making it an indispensable guide for both personal conduct and collective conscience.

For as long as I can remember, I have been listening to these fifty-seven Saloks since childhood. Even then, they fascinated me—their cadence, their conciseness, and the solemn gravity with which they addressed the human condition. Over time, what once stirred only a devotional response began to reveal layers of meaning previously imperceptible. Now, after years of

reflection and study, I have begun to grasp the deep ethical, existential, and practical wisdom enshrined in these sacred verses.

I have long held the supposition that if these Saloks were properly understood, they could provide a framework for cultivating better, more enlightened leadership in universities and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Their brevity conceals immense depth; their poetic restraint masks a profound diagnostic of human life and social responsibility. Repeated engagement with these verses reveals not merely spiritual insight, but a structured orientation toward leadership formation. Over time, what initially inspired devotion gradually revealed ***layers of meaning****—ethical, existential, and spiritual—that continue to unfold even today. These Saloks are not merely verses to be recited; they have become a* ***mirror for reflection****, shaping my understanding of impermanence, attachment, discernment, and freedom.*

In an era where universities and HEIs struggle with instability, performative governance, and crisis-driven decision-making, these Saloks offer a remarkably coherent architecture for sustainable leadership. They provide not rules or protocols, but principles grounded in ethical integrity, moral courage, and strategic discernment—qualities essential for navigating the complexities of modern academic administration. The Saloks themselves seem to be composed with deliberate progression: from confronting the impermanence of life to exposing the illusions of worldly attachment, from cultivating discernment and detachment to anchoring the soul in freedom and Divine remembrance. It is in this carefully calibrated movement that I perceived a distinctive theory of leadership—one that is neither managerial nor procedural, but existential, ethical, and reflective.

> *This book emerges from that long-standing engagement, reflection, and reverence. It seeks to translate the timeless wisdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur's Salok Mahalla 9 into insights for contemporary leadership, demonstrating that spiritual pedagogy and ethical administration are not only compatible, but mutually enriching. Through sustained engagement, and guided by the experiences of life and the challenges I have observed in academic and institutional contexts, I have sought to* ***conceptualize and map my personal understanding*** *of these Saloks. I have reflected on how their insights might inform* ***principled and enlightened leadership*** *in universities and Higher Education Institutions. This is* ***my own interpretive application****—an attempt to translate the ethical and existential wisdom of the Saloks into a coherent framework that speaks to the challenges of guiding institutions, cultivating fairness, and fostering integrity. It is an exercise in* ***applied understanding****, grounded not only in reflection and study of the text, but in the lived reality of observing human behaviour, institutional dynamics, and the interplay of values and action. In this sense, the work is* ***intensely personal****. It represents my journey of listening, reflecting, and discerning—transforming the aphoristic wisdom of Salok Mahalla 9 into insights that resonate with both inner life and organizational responsibility. The insights emerge from* ***experience as much as study****, combining contemplation of the sacred verses*

with the realities of navigating human, ethical, and organizational challenges.

1.1 Research Design

1.1.1. Research Orientation

This study is designed as a conceptual–theoretical inquiry grounded in a thematic–ethical analysis of *Salok Mahalla 9* by Guru Tegh Bahadur, as enshrined in the Sri Guru Granth Sahib. It arises from a sustained engagement with the fifty-seven Saloks and from an intuitive yet disciplined perception that their arrangement discloses an underlying ethical architecture rather than a collection of isolated aphorisms.

The research seeks to identify the structured ethical pedagogy embedded within the corpus and to examine its constructive relevance for leadership formation in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). While the Saloks have often been approached devotionally or exegetically, this study proceeds from the interpretive insight that their thematic recurrence, internal clustering, and patterned progression suggest a coherent pedagogical movement.

The design does not pursue philological exegesis, historical reconstruction, or doctrinal comparison. Instead, it adopts a conceptually integrative and hermeneutically reflective approach, treating the Saloks as a cumulative ethical discourse whose internal architecture can be analytically mapped and constructively extended into contemporary leadership contexts. The thematic classification employed in this study emerged through careful immersion in the text, where repeated motifs of impermanence, Māyā, detachment, and Naam gradually revealed a discernible structural progression. The mapping is therefore neither imposed nor accidental; it represents a reasoned articulation of a perceived internal coherence.

The study is thus intentionally:

- **Normative rather than merely descriptive**, seeking to articulate an ethical vision rather than catalog textual themes;
- **Theoretically generative rather than empirically deductive**, constructing a conceptual framework grounded in textual insight;
- **Interpretive yet systematically structured**, combining intuitive perception with methodological rigor;
- **Pedagogically oriented rather than devotional**, engaging the Saloks as a curriculum of formation with implications for contemporary leadership.

In this sense, the research represents an applied extension of the author's sustained engagement with the text—an attempt to translate perceived ethical depth into a structured theoretical framework for cultivating enlightened leadership within institutional settings.

1.1.2. Methodological Framework

The research employs a **thematic–ethical analytical methodology**, structured in four stages:

Stage I: Textual Immersion

In this study, textual immersion denotes sustained, sequential, and reflective engagement with the fifty-seven Saloks as a unified corpus. Rather than approaching them as isolated poetic utterances, the Saloks were read repeatedly in continuity, with attention to recurring motifs, rhetorical intensification, and thematic clustering. This process involved identifying conceptual patterns, mapping overlaps, and testing intuitive perceptions of structural coherence against textual recurrence. Such immersion allowed the pedagogical density of the corpus—situated near the conclusion of the Guru Granth Sahib—to disclose an internal architecture that may not be immediately apparent through atomistic reading.

Salok	Central Theme of Each Salok as Interpreted
1	Life is fleeting; meditate on God.
2	Sin and attachment lead to bondage; remember God.
3	Youth passes; meditate on the Lord.
4	Old age comes; ignoring God leads to regret.
5	Possessions and wealth are impermanent; know the truth.
6	God uplifts the fallen; fearlessness through His support.
7	Body and wealth are temporary; embrace Naam.
8	Comfort and wealth given; remembrance of God is essential.
9	Without Naam, life is wasted.
10	Mind trapped in Maya; meditation is necessary.
11	Body is made of five elements; contentment is true wealth.
12	Lord abides in every heart; meditation removes fear.
13	Equanimity in pleasure and pain leads to knowing God.
14	Detachment and non-discrimination bring liberation.
15	Joy and sorrow are equal; no friend/foe is permanent.
16	True wisdom comes from fearlessness and compassion.
17	Abandon sin; detachment brings good fortune.
18	Renunciation of possessiveness allows Divine presence in heart.
19	Forsaking ego and recognizing God brings liberation.
20	Naam destroys fear and evil thoughts; meditate day and night.
21	Vibrate God’s praises with tongue; listen to Naam; death’s snare avoided.
22	Seek God’s shelter; no other way to liberation exists.
23	Once bonds are broken, all rests in God’s hands.
24	In adversity, only God is reliable; friends abandon you.
25	Remain in Naam and company of saints; follow Guru.
26	Mind blinded by Maya falls into bondage; remember God.
27	Take refuge in God; human birth is rare and precious.
28	Foolish chase of Maya wastes life; meditate on God.
29	Constant remembrance of God unites the servant with the Divine.
30	Mind engrossed in Maya forgets Naam; life loses value.
31	Without remembrance of God, one falls repeatedly into bondage.
32	Only God remains as support; companions vanish in suffering.
33	Fear of death vanishes through faith and meditation.
34	Ego does not depart despite effort; prayer to God preserves.

35	All life stages pass in vain without meditation on God.
36	Missed opportunities and greed cause regret; act wisely.
37	Mind absorbed in Maya cannot detach.
38	Desire versus reality; heed God to escape deception.
39	Human efforts cannot replace God's will; meditate on God.
40	Only God is the true Giver; desires fulfilled through Him.
41	Pride and falsehood are meaningless; life is a dream.
42	Body perishes; singing Divine praises conquers the world.
43	Heart with God's remembrance is liberated; no separation from Divine.
44	Person without devotion is spiritually blind.
45	One-pointed mind devoted to God ensures liberation.
46	Actions done with pride are fruitless.
47	Physical weakness without spiritual focus is meaningless.
48	God-consciousness strengthens and anchors the mind.
49	Falsehood collapses; only God's will endures.
50	Nothing is permanent; the world is like a dream.
51	Worry is futile; attachment causes anxiety.
52	Whatever is born will perish; meditate and abandon entanglements.
53	Seek God's shelter when strength departs; nothing else helps.
54	Once bonds are broken, all rests in God's hands; He alone helps.
55	Friends abandon in adversity; only God remains faithful.
56	Detached living, in Naam and Guru's company, is ideal.
57	Enshrining God's Name brings liberation and vision of Divine.

Table 1: Central Theme of Each Salok as Interpreted

Stage II: Thematic Clustering

The Saloks are organized into primary conceptual categories that emerge through internal coherence:

1. **Kaal (Impermanence / Existential Finitude)**
2. **Māyā (Illusion / Attachment / Ego-Formation)**
3. **Collapse / Ethical Instability**
4. **Vivek/ Bairag (Discernment / Detachment / Ethical Capacity)**
5. **Naam (Inner Anchoring / Moral Completion)**

This clustering does not impose external doctrine but identifies recurring ethical movements within the corpus. The purpose of clustering is analytical clarity, not reduction.

Stage III: Sequential Pedagogical Mapping

The themes are examined not as parallel ideas but as a **developmental ethical progression**, forming what this study terms a *pedagogical funnel*:

- Existential Diagnosis (Kaal)
- Illusory Attachment (Māyā)
- Manifest Consequences (Collapse / Ethical Instability)
- Capacity Formation (Vivek/Bairag)
- Moral Completion (Naam)

This sequential reading forms the structural backbone of the research.

Stage IV: Applied Conceptual Translation

The final stage maps these existential categories onto leadership formation within HEIs. Rather than converting spiritual wisdom into managerial slogans, the study identifies structural parallels between:

- Individual existential confusion and institutional dysfunction
- Attachment to prestige and performative governance
- Fear-driven decision-making and ethical delay
- Detachment and principled administrative action

The objective is conceptual application, not theological imposition.

1.1.3. Research Assumptions

Foundational Assumptions

This design emerges from my sustained engagement with *Salok Mahalla 9* and rests upon several interrelated foundational assumptions that guide both its interpretive method and its constructive application:

1. **That *Salok Mahalla 9* constitutes an internally coherent ethical pedagogy rather than a random anthology.** Through repeated and sequential reading, I have come to perceive a structured progression within the fifty-seven Saloks. Their thematic clustering, cumulative intensification, and patterned movement suggest intentional pedagogical design rather than episodic reflection.
2. **That ethical leadership is fundamentally existential before it is procedural.** My working premise is that leadership failure does not arise primarily from technical incompetence but from instability at the level of identity, attachment, and fear. Ethical steadiness, therefore, must be grounded in existential clarity before it can manifest in administrative practice.
3. **That institutional instability reflects deficiencies in existential clarity at the level of leadership formation.** Organizational crises often mirror deeper anxieties—attachment to power, status, recognition, or control. I approach leadership formation as a process of interior stabilization, recognizing that structural reform without ontological anchoring remains fragile.
4. **That spiritual texts may function as normative resources for organizational ethics without compromising theological integrity.** This study proceeds on the conviction that the ethical vision embedded within the Guru Granth Sahib can be constructively engaged in contemporary institutional contexts. Such engagement does not instrumentalize the text but respectfully translates its ontological insights into leadership formation discourse.

Taken together, these assumptions reflect not abstract theoretical commitments alone but a reasoned interpretive stance shaped through prolonged immersion in the text and reflection on contemporary institutional realities. They provide the conceptual ground upon which the thematic–ethical analysis of this study is constructed.

1.1.4. Hypothesis Architecture

Integrative Hypothesis Framework

The research design is structured around one integrative hypothesis supported by a series of analytically derived sub-hypotheses. These propositions arise from my sustained thematic engagement with *Salok Mahalla 9* by Guru Tegh Bahadur, as preserved in the Sri Guru Granth Sahib. They represent a reasoned articulation of the structural logic I perceive within the fifty-seven Saloks and its implications for leadership formation in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

H1: Integrative Hypothesis

Ethical leadership in higher education emerges through a sequential process of existential formation articulated in *Salok Mahalla 9*, wherein impermanence (*Kaal*) and Māyā function as foundational diagnostic categories; social and institutional collapse appear as their applied manifestations; detachment cultivates ethical capacity; and Naam completes moral freedom. Within this framework, leadership failure is not accidental or episodic but the predictable outcome of leadership formed without existential clarity and ontological anchoring. This integrative hypothesis synthesizes the thematic architecture identified in Part I and the ontological foundations developed in Part II.

Supporting Hypotheses

H2: Diagnostic Hypothesis

Leadership dysfunction correlates with the denial of impermanence and the dominance of Māyā. Such denial manifests in fear-driven governance, prestige dependence, ethical postponement, reputation management, and performative compliance. This hypothesis proceeds from the conviction that existential insecurity precedes procedural distortion.

H3: Manifestation Hypothesis

Institutional instability or collapse represents the applied manifestation of unaddressed existential illusion. Where leadership identity is grounded in status, possession, or control, structural fragility becomes inevitable.

H4: *Capacity* Formation Hypothesis

Detachment and discernment (*bibek*) cultivate ethical leadership capacity independent of positional authority. Here, leadership is understood not as hierarchical power but as interior steadiness formed through disciplined disengagement from egoic attachment.

H5: Completion Hypothesis

Naam functions as the stabilizing inner anchor that sustains moral integrity without reliance on external enforcement. Ethical freedom, in this sense, arises from ontological alignment rather than regulatory surveillance.

H6: Pedagogical Funnel Hypothesis

The fifty-seven Saloks are pedagogically structured to move from existential diagnosis to moral stabilization, indicating intentional ethical sequencing rather than thematic randomness. This hypothesis grounds the conceptual model in textual architecture.

H7: Applied Leadership Hypothesis

Institutions that prioritize procedural compliance without attending to existential formation are structurally predisposed to ethical fragility. Compliance may regulate behavior temporarily, but without interior anchoring, ethical resilience remains unstable.

These hypotheses do not emerge from abstract theoretical construction alone. They represent my considered attempt to translate a perceived internal coherence within *Salok Mahalla 9* into a structured framework for leadership formation. While interpretive in origin, each hypothesis is anchored in thematic mapping and conceptual analysis, allowing intuitive insight to be articulated in systematically defensible form.

1.1.5. Scope and Delimitations

This study is intentionally delimited in scope, reflecting both methodological discipline and conceptual clarity.

- First, it does **not** claim to offer an exhaustive or comprehensive interpretation of Sikh theology as articulated within the Sri Guru Granth Sahib. My engagement is focused specifically on the ethical architecture of *Salok Mahalla 9* by Guru Tegh Bahadur, and even within that corpus, the inquiry remains oriented toward its implications for existential formation and leadership ethics rather than doctrinal totality.
- Second, the study does **not** empirically test leadership outcomes, nor does it attempt statistical validation of institutional performance. The argument advanced here is conceptual and normative. It proposes a structured framework for leadership formation grounded in thematic–ethical analysis, while recognizing that empirical investigation would constitute a subsequent phase of research.
- Third, the study does **not** seek to instrumentalize Gurmat teachings by reducing them to secular administrative technique. The objective is not managerial optimization but ontological and ethical formation. Any application to higher education leadership remains anchored in theological integrity rather than strategic appropriation.

Within these delimitations, the study develops a normative theoretical framework intended to guide future empirical research, curricular design, and pedagogical experimentation in university leadership studies. It represents my considered effort to articulate how the existential and ethical insights embedded within *Salok Mahalla 9* may contribute constructively to contemporary conversations on leadership formation—without collapsing theology into technique or scholarship into devotion.

1.1.6. Contribution to Scholarship

This research seeks to contribute to three intersecting domains of inquiry, emerging from my sustained engagement with *Salok Mahalla 9* and its ethical architecture:

1. **Sikh Ethical Studies** — by articulating *Salok Mahalla 9* as a structured pedagogical system rather than a collection of isolated devotional aphorisms. Through thematic mapping and conceptual analysis, the study proposes that the fifty-seven Saloks of Guru Tegh Bahadur, as preserved in the Sri Guru Granth Sahib, disclose an intentional ethical progression grounded in existential formation.
2. **Leadership Theory** — by re-centering existential clarity and ontological anchoring as the precondition for ethical governance. The framework advanced here challenges leadership models that prioritize technique, compliance, or performance metrics without attending to interior formation. It argues that leadership stability arises from disciplined engagement with impermanence, detachment, and moral discernment.
3. **Higher Education Studies** — by offering a non-managerial and ethically grounded leadership architecture. Rather than treating universities as purely administrative systems, this study conceptualizes them as moral ecosystems shaped by the existential orientation of their leaders.

In positioning the Saloks as living ethical resources rather than historical artefacts, I seek to establish a careful conceptual bridge between sacred text and contemporary institutional responsibility. This engagement does not instrumentalize scripture; rather, it respectfully extends its ethical insights into present-day leadership discourse. The contribution, therefore, lies not only in textual interpretation but in constructive translation—articulating how a spiritually grounded ontology may inform institutional integrity in higher education

1.2 Rationale for Thematic–Ethical Clustering of Salok Mahalla 9

Why Not Study Each Salok Independently?

A line-by-line, isolated study of each Salok—while philologically legitimate—risks fragmenting what appears to be a **deliberately coherent ethical architecture**. The fifty-seven Saloks attributed to Guru Tegh Bahadur, as preserved in the Sri Guru Granth Sahib, are aphoristic in form. Aphorisms, by their nature, are compressed and inter-referential; their meaning expands when read in relational sequence rather than in isolation.

Studying each Salok independently may:

- Reduce the text to moral maxims detached from structural intention
- Encourage atomistic interpretation rather than systemic coherence
- Obscure pedagogical progression embedded in the ordering
- Privilege linguistic commentary over ethical formation

The Saloks are concise, but they are not random. Their cumulative effect suggests **progression, intensification, and resolution**. An isolated reading may illuminate individual insights, but it

cannot adequately account for the possibility that the corpus itself constitutes an ethical movement. Thus, the decision not to treat each Salok independently is not a dismissal of close reading, but a recognition that **ethical pedagogy unfolds cumulatively**.

Broad Theme Category	Primary Saloks Covered	Core Ethical–Philosophical Focus	Overlapping Themes & Common Saloks (Verified)
Impermanence of Life (ਕਾਲ / ਅਨਿਤਜਤਾ)	1, 2, 5, 7, 9, 13, 17, 18, 21, 24, 30, 37, 39, 44, 46, 52	Inevitability of death; dissolution of body, power, and status; exposure of fragility of all forms	Overlaps with **Social Collapse**: 2, 9, 18, 44, 46
Futility of Worldly Attachment – Māyā (ਮਾਇਆ / ਸੰਸਾਰਿਕ ਮੋਹ)	4, 8, 10, 15, 19, 25, 28, 32, 35, 42, 49, 51	Illusion of permanence; ego, desire, anxiety, and attachment to pleasure and recognition	Overlaps with **Social Collapse**: 8, 19, 42
Collapse of Relationships, Status, and Social Identity *(Derivative)*	2, 8, 9, 18, 19, 42, 44, 46	Breakdown of family, wealth, power, and reputation at death or crisis	Overlaps with **Impermanence**: 2, 9, 18, 44, 46; **Māyā**: 8, 19, 42
Detachment, Discernment, and Ethical Wakefulness (ਬਿਬੇਕ / ਵੈਰਾਗ)	12, 16, 23, 26, 27, 31, 36, 40, 41, 45, 48, 53, 56	Ethical preparedness, restraint, humility, vigilance, and moral courage	**No numerical overlap**; this theme functions as a **formative ethical response**
Liberation through Naam and Divine Wisdom (ਨਾਮ / ਗਿਆਨ)	3, 6, 11, 14, 20, 22, 29, 33, 34, 38, 43, 47, 50, 54, 55, 57	Inner anchoring, fearlessness, spiritual completion, God-consciousness	**No numerical overlap**; this theme represents **ethical–spiritual culmination**

1.3 Implication for Leadership Formation

Statistically and structurally, the data confirm the study's central theoretical proposition:

- Ethical failure arises from unresolved diagnostic conditions (impermanence denied, illusion embraced).
- Ethical leadership requires movement beyond diagnosis toward cultivated detachment.
- Sustainable integrity depends upon inner anchoring rather than external compliance.

Thus, the distribution of themes is not merely descriptive—it is pedagogically revealing. Overlap is confined to domains of existential disorder, while ethical formation and liberation remain structurally distinct and sequential. The statistical insight therefore strengthens the integrative hypothesis: **existential clarity precedes ethical capacity, and inner freedom precedes institutional integrity.** The thematic architecture of the Saloks stands confirmed not only philosophically, but structurally. The 57 Saloks of Salok Mahalla 9 constitute a structured ethical pedagogy. Their internal distribution demonstrates that existential diagnosis is

deliberately concentrated and overlapping, while ethical formation and spiritual culmination remain structurally distinct. This pattern reveals an intentional pedagogical movement from destabilization of worldly attachment to stabilization in Naam.

1.4 Integrative Analytical Statement

The overlap analysis confirms that Salok Mahalla 9 operates through a layered ethical pedagogy: impermanence and Māyā diagnose human vulnerability, social collapse manifests their consequences, detachment cultivates ethical readiness, and Naam completes moral and spiritual freedom.

Theme	Saloks (Common Saloks are Pink Higlighted)																Count	%age
Impermanence of Life (ਕਾਲ / ਅਨਿਤਜਤਾ)	1	2	5	7	9	13	17	18	21	24	30	37	39	44	46	52	16	28
Futility of Worldly Attachment (ਮਾਇਆ / ਸੰਸਾਰਿਕ ਮੋਹ)	4	8	10	15	19	25	28	32	35	42	49	51					12	21
Detachment, Discernment, and Ethical Wakefulness (ਬਿਬੇਕ / ਵੈਰਾਗ)	12	16	23	26	27	31	36	40	41	45	48	53	56				13	23
Liberation through Naam and Divine Wisdom (ਨਾਮ / ਗਿਆਨ)	3	6	11	14	20	22	29	33	34	38	43	47	50	54	55	57	16	28
																	57	100

Axis	Why it is independent
1. Impermanence (ਕਾਲ / ਅਨਿਤਜਤਾ)	Ontological reality governing all forms
2. Māyā (ਮਾਇਆ / ਮੋਹ)	Psychological–ethical distortion of perception
3. Ethical Discernment & Detachment (ਬਿਬੇਕ / ਵੈਰਾਗ)	Human response to impermanence and illusion
4. Liberation through Naam (ਨਾਮ / ਗਿਆਨ)	Transformative resolution beyond fear and attachment

Summary

Chapter 1 establishes the conceptual and philosophical foundations of this study by situating *Salok Mahalla 9* within an integrated ethical and pedagogical framework. It argues that the Saloks are not isolated devotional utterances but constitute a coherent moral architecture grounded in existential clarity, detachment, and moral courage. The chapter foregrounds the idea that ethical leadership begins not with administrative technique but with inner formation — a disciplined reorientation of consciousness.

Drawing upon Gurmat philosophy, the discussion identifies fearlessness, impermanence-awareness, ego-transcendence, and spiritual steadfastness as foundational virtues that precede institutional responsibility. Leadership, therefore, is interpreted as an ontological condition before it becomes a managerial function. Institutional crises are framed not merely as structural failures but as reflections of compromised existential grounding.

The chapter further clarifies methodological positioning: the study approaches the Saloks as normative ethical resources while preserving their theological integrity. Rather than reducing sacred text to instrumental management theory, it proposes a dialogical engagement between scriptural wisdom and contemporary leadership studies.

In doing so, Chapter 1 lays the theoretical groundwork for interpreting each Salok as part of a structured ethical pedagogy — one capable of informing leadership formation in higher education and beyond. It prepares the reader for the thematic analysis that follows, where existential insight becomes the central organizing lens of interpretation.

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Chapter 2

Ethical Pedagogy in Practice
Leadership Formation in Higher Education

Chapter 1 established that *Salok Mahalla 9* constitutes a structured ethical pedagogy rather than a collection of isolated spiritual reflections. Through thematic analysis, it demonstrated that the fifty-seven Saloks articulate a deliberate progression—from existential diagnosis through ethical capacity formation to moral freedom. This chapter builds directly upon those foundations by examining how that ethical architecture can be meaningfully applied to leadership formation within Universities and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

Contemporary higher education is marked by volatility, performative governance, regulatory saturation, and recurring ethical crises. Leadership responses in such contexts often prioritize procedural compliance, reputational management, and short-term stabilization. Chapter 1 argued that these responses frequently fail because they operate at the level of technique rather than formation. The ethical pedagogy embedded in *Salok Mahalla 9*—as articulated by Guru Tegh Bahadur—offers an alternative grounding, one that begins with existential clarity rather than administrative control.

This chapter therefore treats higher education leadership not primarily as a managerial function but as a moral and ontological responsibility. Ontological Condition is basically the fundamental state of being that defines the nature of human existence. The book examines the ontological condition of humanity as vulnerable yet capable of moral freedom. Drawing upon the thematic outcomes identified earlier—impermanence (*Kaal*), illusion (*Māyā*), collapse of social assurances, discernment and detachment (*Vivek/Bairāg*), and anchoring in Naam—it explores how leaders are formed, sustained, or destabilized under institutional pressure. The focus shifts from "what leaders do" to "what leaders are prepared to endure, relinquish, and embody."

By mapping these ethical themes onto leadership contexts, Chapter 2 proposes a non-instrumental model of governance—one in which courage precedes compliance, discernment precedes decision-making, and integrity precedes authority. In doing so, it seeks to demonstrate that the ethical insights of *Salok Mahalla 9* function not only as spiritual guidance but as a living framework for resilient, principled leadership in higher education.

Gurmat Ontology and Leadership Formation
(A Flow from Ontology to Institutional Outcomes)

This two-path model illustrates how leadership trajectories diverge based on existential formation. When impermanence is denied and Māyā governs perception, leadership becomes fear-driven and institutions exhibit predictable ethical collapse.

Ontological Foundations (Gurmat)

Kaal and Māyā as diagnostic realities

(Human consciousness situated within time and illusion)

Kaal (Impermanence) + Māyā

(Transience + Illusion of permanence)

- **Kaal (Impermanence):** All forms—body, authority, institutions—are transient
- **Māyā (Illusion):** Attachment to roles, prestige, metrics, and permanence
- **Ontological Insight:** Ethical failure begins with misrecognition of reality

Leadership Formation (Two Paths)

Unformed vs Formed leadership trajectories

UNFORMED PATH (Existential Misrecognition)	FORMED PATH (Existential Discernment)
• **Denial of impermanence** (Authority assumed durable, Institution treated as end) • **Dominance of Māyā - Identity fused with role and reputation** (Role-identity fixation, Prestige & metric anxiety) • **Leadership Behaviour - Fear-driven, performative compliance** (Fear-driven governance, Ethical delay, Performative compliance) • **Applied Consequence - Social & Institutional Collapse** (Crisis reactivity, Loss of trust)	• **Acceptance of impermanence** (Authority recognized as temporary and entrusted) • **Discernment of Māyā - Discernment (Bibek) and detachment (Vairāg)** (Freedom from role-identity, Reduced reputational fear) • **Ethical Capacity Formation Bibek / Vairāg - Ethical action without assurance** (Discernment under pressure, Detachment from outcomes) • **Naam as inner anchoring** (Ontological Completion - Inner anchoring, Fearlessness beyond loss, Integrity without enforcement)

Ethical Capacity Formation

Bibek, Vairāg, and ethics as assimilation

When impermanence is accepted, illusion discerned, and consciousness anchored through Bibek and Naam, leadership ethics emerge as assimilated capacity rather than enforced compliance, producing institutional resilience and moral stability.

- **Bibek (Discernment):** Clarity under pressure
- **Vairāg (Detachment):** Freedom from approval and fear
- **Ethics as Formation:** Assimilated consciousness, not imposed compliance

Institutional Outcomes

Collapse vs resilience and integrity

Outcomes of Unformed Leadership	Outcomes of Formed Leadership
• Ethical fragility - Ethical delay and reputational anxiety • Governance instability - Crisis-driven governance	• Stability during crisis -Moral courage and steadiness • Trust-based governance • Ethical resilience - Institutional resilience and integrity

• Reputation-dependent ethics - Social and institutional collapse	

Table 1: Two-Path Model of Leadership Formation in Gurmat Ontology

2.1 When Structures Hold but Leadership Falters: Illustrative Cases from Higher Education

Before turning to conceptual clarification and ontological analysis, it is instructive to consider a set of illustrative leadership situations drawn from common patterns in contemporary higher education. These cases are not empirical findings nor institutional critiques. Rather, they function as pedagogical vignettes—designed to illuminate how leadership failure and ethical fragility often arise not from lack of policy, competence, or intent, but from deficiencies in existential formation.

Each case reflects conditions routinely encountered in universities and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), and each reveals how attachment, fear, and illusion shape leadership behavior long before formal decisions are made.

Case 1: The Crisis That Could Not Be Named

A senior academic administrator becomes aware of a serious procedural irregularity affecting faculty appointments. Internal advisors recommend immediate disclosure and corrective action. However, the administrator delays, concerned that public acknowledgment may damage institutional reputation, invite regulatory scrutiny, and jeopardize personal standing.

Committees are formed. Language is softened. Responsibility is diffused. What begins as a manageable ethical moment gradually escalates into reputational damage far exceeding the original issue.

From an administrative standpoint, this appears as a failure of decisiveness. From a Gurmat ontological perspective, the failure is deeper: an inability to act ethically under impermanence. The leader operates as though reputation, position, and institutional continuity are permanent supports rather than fragile forms subject to time. Ethical delay here is not strategic—it is existential.

Case 2: Governance Without Grounding

A university implements an expansive compliance framework—ethics committees, reporting protocols, and audit mechanisms. On paper, governance appears robust. Yet faculty and staff quietly recognize that ethical concerns are addressed only when externally visible or legally unavoidable.

Leadership decisions consistently prioritize procedural defensibility over moral clarity. Ethical issues are managed, not confronted.

This case illustrates how ethics becomes compliance when leadership lacks ontological anchoring. Rules multiply precisely because inner steadiness is absent. From the perspective of *Salok Mahalla 9*, this represents governance shaped by Māyā: reliance on external assurance to compensate for internal insecurity.

Case 3: The Collapse of Loyalty

A long-serving institutional leader faces sudden political pressure—budget cuts, leadership turnover, or external intervention. Colleagues who once expressed loyalty distance themselves. Advisory voices fall silent. Relationships that appeared stable dissolve rapidly.

The leader experiences this as betrayal. Yet the Saloks repeatedly caution against mistaking functional relationships for enduring support. This moment reveals not the moral failure of others alone, but the prior misrecognition of relational permanence.

In Gurmat ontology, this collapse is not anomalous. It is diagnostic. It exposes leadership identity that had unconsciously relied on social validation rather than ethical preparedness.

Case 4: Ethical Action Without Assurance

In contrast, consider a leader who, when faced with institutional risk, chooses transparent disclosure and principled action despite personal cost. The outcome is uncertain; support is not guaranteed. Yet the decision is made without anxiety-driven calculation.

Such leadership is rare, but not accidental. It reflects detachment from role-identity and anchoring beyond outcome—what Gurmat names *Bibek* and ultimately *Naam*. Ethical action here does not depend on reward, recognition, or institutional survival. It proceeds from inner steadiness.

Case 5: When Visibility Becomes Vulnerability

An institution of higher learning organizes a high-profile international academic summit intended to signal global relevance, innovation leadership, and intellectual prestige. The event is carefully curated for visibility—distinguished guests, symbolic gestures, media amplification, and institutional branding.

During the course of the event, an episode occurs that rapidly shifts public perception. What had been framed as institutional achievement becomes a source of scrutiny and reputational anxiety. Responses emerge quickly—clarifications, justifications, and corrective statements—yet the narrative continues to unfold beyond institutional control.

What is pedagogically significant in this case is not the incident itself, but the *velocity of reversal*. Symbolic capital accumulated through visibility proves fragile under ethical attention. Prestige, once assumed to confer protection, instead magnifies exposure.

From a Gurmat ontological perspective, this case illustrates *Māyā* operating through performative success—the illusion that recognition, global association, and symbolic affirmation provide stability. The implicit denial of *Kaal* is evident in the assumption that carefully managed appearances can withstand temporal scrutiny. Ethical anticipation (*Bibek*) remains underdeveloped, subordinated to spectacle and momentum. The subsequent instability is therefore not anomalous; it is structurally predictable.

This case reinforces a recurring lesson of *Salok Mahalla 9*: when leadership identity is anchored in visibility rather than ethical preparedness, time does not merely reveal weakness—it accelerates it. Collapse, in such instances, is not caused by the event, but disclosed by it.

Pedagogical Significance of the Illustrations: These cases are intentionally presented without resolution metrics or success indicators. Their purpose is not to prescribe managerial solutions, but to surface a deeper question: **What kind of leader is being formed before crisis arrives?**

Together, the illustrations underscore a central claim of this chapter: ethical breakdown in higher education is rarely procedural in origin. It is ontological. When impermanence is denied and Māyā governs perception, collapse follows predictably. When detachment and inner anchoring are cultivated, ethical leadership becomes possible even under uncertainty.

Ontological Alignment of the Illustrative Cases

The four illustrative cases introduced above are not merely descriptive leadership scenarios; each embodies a specific ontological condition articulated within *Salok Mahalla 9*. Read together, they function as applied demonstrations of how impermanence (*Kaal*), illusion (*Māyā*), discernment (*Bibek*), and anchoring (*Naam*) operate within leadership consciousness under institutional pressure.

Case 1: The Crisis That Could Not Be Named

Ontological Condition: Denial of *Kaal* intensified by *Māyā*
In this case, leadership delay arises from an implicit refusal to accept impermanence. Reputation, position, and institutional image are treated as stable entities that must be preserved at all costs. *Māyā* operates by persuading the leader that ethical action can be postponed until security is ensured. The resulting failure is not one of intelligence or policy, but of existential misrecognition—acting as though time, authority, and control are permanent.

Case 2: Governance Without Grounding

Ontological Condition: *Māyā* substituted for ethical anchoring
Here, compliance structures function as psychological reassurance rather than ethical formation. Leadership behaviour is governed by procedural defensibility rather than moral clarity. The illusion lies in believing that ethics can be outsourced to systems. From a Gurmat

perspective, this reflects *Māyā* operating at an institutional level—where external mechanisms are mistaken for inner steadiness.

Case 3: The Collapse of Loyalty

Ontological Condition: Misplaced reliance exposed by *Kaal*
This case illustrates how *Kaal* dissolves social and relational assurances during moments of crisis. The leader's sense of betrayal reveals an earlier ontological error: mistaking functional relationships for enduring support. The collapse is not anomalous; it is diagnostic. It exposes leadership identity that had unconsciously anchored itself in approval and affiliation rather than ethical preparedness.

Case 4: Ethical Action Without Assurance

Ontological Condition: *Bibek* sustained and completed by *Naam*
This case stands in contrast to the previous three. The leader acts without outcome assurance, detached from role preservation and reputational anxiety. *Bibek* enables discernment and restraint under pressure, while *Naam* provides inner anchoring beyond gain and loss. Ethical action here is not reactive but assimilated—flowing from formed consciousness rather than enforced obligation.

Case 5: When Visibility Becomes Vulnerability

Ontological Condition: Māyā intensified by denial of Kaal; absence of Bibek and Naam
This case stands in deliberate contrast to Case 4. Here, leadership action is shaped by outcome assurance, reputational anxiety, and the pursuit of symbolic affirmation. Decision-making unfolds under the assumption that visibility confers stability and prestige offers protection. *Māyā* operates by equating recognition with security, while the reality of *Kaal*—the fragility of time-bound forms—is implicitly denied.

In the absence of *Bibek*, ethical anticipation and restraint remain underdeveloped. Momentum replaces discernment; spectacle overrides ethical foresight. When scrutiny arises, responses become reactive rather than grounded, revealing leadership identity anchored in appearance rather than inner steadiness. The lack of *Naam*—inner anchoring beyond gain and loss—renders leadership vulnerable to rapid reversal once external affirmation dissipates.

Ethical instability in this case does not originate in the precipitating event itself, but in prior ontological misalignment. Action flows not from formed consciousness but from performative compulsion. Collapse, therefore, is not accidental; it is the predictable consequence of leadership shaped by illusion rather than ethical preparedness.

Case	Leadership Situation	Dominant Ontological Force	Ontological Failure / Capacity	Gurmat Insight
Case 1	Ethical delay during institutional crisis	Māyā + denial of Kaal	Fear-driven postponement; attachment to reputation	Impermanence denied → ethical paralysis
Case 2	Compliance-heavy governance	Māyā	External systems replace inner formation	Ethics reduced to procedure
Case 3	Breakdown of loyalty in crisis	Kaal	Collapse exposes misplaced anchoring	Social assurances are impermanent
Case 4	Ethical action without guarantee	Bibek + Naam	Detachment and inner steadiness	Ethics emerges from formation, not fear
Case 5	High-visibility academic summit leading to reputational instability	Māyā + denial of Kaal	Attachment to prestige; lack of ethical anticipation	Visibility magnifies fragility when anchoring is absent

Table 2 Summary Table: Ontological Mapping of Illustrative HEI Leadership Cases

Integrative Pedagogical Insight

Together, these cases demonstrate that leadership outcomes are not determined primarily by intelligence, experience, or policy design. They are shaped by ontological orientation. Where *Kaal* is denied and *Māyā* governs perception, ethical failure becomes predictable. Where *Bibek* is cultivated and *Naam* anchors consciousness, ethical leadership becomes sustainable—even under uncertainty.

These illustrative mappings prepare the ground for the conceptual analysis that follows, reinforcing the central claim of this chapter: **ethics in higher education leadership is not enforced through compliance, but formed through existential clarity and inner anchoring.**

2.2 From Existential Insight to Ethical Practice: A Gurmat Lens on Leadership

The ethical vision that emerges from the thematic axes of Salok Mahalla 9 does not remain confined to the spiritual interior of the text. Rather, it invites a careful translation into the lived realities of contemporary leadership, particularly within higher education governance. This translation is not an act of doctrinal imposition. Instead, it is a movement from *existential clarity* to *ethical competence*. The insights drawn from Gurmat ontology—impermanence,

illusion, discernment, and inner anchoring—are rendered into non-sectarian leadership capacities such as moral courage, ethical independence, resistance to performative compliance, and steadiness under pressure. In this sense, institutional ethics are no longer grounded primarily in rules, surveillance, or compliance mechanisms, but in the inner formation of those who lead. The bridge established here is therefore not between religion and administration, but between *formed consciousness* and *ethical action*, allowing Gurmat wisdom to speak meaningfully to modern leadership practice without dilution or appropriation.

In analysing Salok Mahalla 9 by **Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib**, this study deliberately resists the temptation to treat the collapse of relationships, status, or social and institutional identity as an independent doctrinal theme. While such moments of collapse appear repeatedly across the Saloks—often with stark poetic force—they do not function as foundational ethical or metaphysical principles within Gurmat thought. Rather, they operate as *symptoms*—visible manifestations of deeper ontological and psychological conditions.

At the ontological level, impermanence (*ਕਾਲ / ਅਨਿਤਜਤਾ*) establishes the inescapable reality that all embodied, social, and institutional forms are transient. At the psychological and ethical level, Māyā operates by obscuring this reality, fostering attachment to roles, relationships, authority, and the illusion of permanence and control. When these two forces converge—unacknowledged transience and sustained illusion—the dissolution of social bonds, reputational security, and institutional stability becomes inevitable.

Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib does not therefore present social failure or institutional breakdown as isolated moral problems demanding surface-level correction. Instead, such collapse is shown to arise predictably when consciousness remains misaligned—when leaders and institutions act as though impermanent forms could provide lasting security. Social and institutional collapse is thus not the *cause* of ethical failure but its *consequence*: a mirror reflecting deeper failures of perception, attachment, and inner anchoring. Within this framework, ethical reform cannot begin with structures alone; it must begin with the reorientation of consciousness itself.

2.3 Impermanence, Illusion, and Instruction: Ontology as Pedagogy in Salok Mahalla 9

Having examined how leadership failure and institutional instability arise from deeper ontological misalignment, this section now turns from applied illustration to foundational instruction. It examines how Salok Mahalla 9 functions pedagogically by confronting consciousness with impermanence and illusion—not as abstract metaphysics, but as formative ethical realism. The focus here is on how ontology itself becomes a method of ethical education.
At the ontological heart of Salok Mahalla 9 lies an unyielding realism about existence itself. *Kaal* establishes the most basic condition of human and institutional life: everything that takes form in time is subject to dissolution. Time erodes not only the physical body but also authority, prestige, lineage, reputation, and the collective structures that humans so often mistake for

permanence. No social arrangement, however powerful or venerable, is exempt from this law of transience.

Alongside this ontological truth operates a psychological and ethical force that Gurmat identifies as *Māyā*. Māyā does not deny impermanence outright; rather, it obscures it by encouraging attachment to roles, relationships, achievements, metrics, and reputational security as though they were enduring anchors. Leaders, institutions, and communities come to act as if recognition could secure stability, and as if control could arrest time. When these two forces converge—inescapable mortality and sustained illusion—the collapse of social and institutional arrangements becomes not an anomaly but an inevitability. Family bonds falter, professional alliances fracture, and institutional legitimacy erodes precisely at moments of crisis because they are grounded in impermanent and illusory identifications rather than ethical clarity or inner anchoring. Social and institutional collapse, in this light, is best understood not as an independent moral failure but as diagnostic evidence of deeper failures in perception and attachment.

It is within this ontological and psychological landscape that the pedagogical genius of Salok Mahalla 9 becomes apparent. **Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib** does not describe abandonment, humiliation, or the irrelevance of wealth at death in order to condemn social life itself. These stark images function didactically rather than doctrinally. They are mirrors held up to consciousness, intended to expose illusion and awaken discernment. The Saloks repeatedly return to moments where external supports vanish—not to instill despair, but to demonstrate their insufficiency as ethical foundations.

Through these examples, the Saloks teach with remarkable economy and force: that reliance on status, approval, or institutional protection is fragile; that attachment to identity invites ethical paralysis; and that ethical preparedness cannot be postponed until crisis arrives. The pedagogy is thus one of *pre-emptive formation*. By confronting the reader with the inevitability of loss and collapse, Salok Mahalla 9 presses the urgency of cultivating inner steadiness before external assurances fail. In doing so, it reinforces a central Gurmat insight: lasting ethical integrity arises not from social reinforcement or institutional power, but from inner formation grounded in truth, discernment, and freedom from illusion.

2.4 Salok Mahalla 9 as a Pedagogical Funnel: From Ontological Diagnosis to Ethical Leadership Formation

This section now integrates the preceding analyses by situating Salok Mahalla 9 within a deliberately structured sequence of ethical formation. Moving beyond isolated themes, it traces how impermanence, illusion, detachment, and inner anchoring unfold as successive stages in a coherent pedagogical progression. What emerges is not a collection of moral injunctions, but a funnel of formation through which ethical leadership is gradually assimilated. This book approaches Salok Mahalla 9 not as a collection of isolated spiritual aphorisms, but as a carefully

structured ethical pedagogy whose internal logic unfolds through discernible stages of formation. Rather than compressing this richness into a single argumentative frame, the study is deliberately organized across **separate chapters**, each devoted to one major axis of Gurmat thought—Impermanence (*Kaal*), Illusion (*Māyā*), Detachment (*Bibek/Vairāg*), and Divine Anchoring (*Naam*). Together, these chapters articulate a coherent architecture of leadership formation with direct relevance to contemporary higher education institutions.

Read in sequence, the Saloks reveal a pedagogical intentionality rather than thematic dispersion. The ethical instruction of **Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib** unfolds as a funnel of formation: consciousness is first confronted with reality, then shown the consequences of misrecognition, gradually trained in ethical capacity, and finally stabilized in inner freedom. What emerges is not a moral checklist, but a disciplined process through which ethical leadership is assimilated rather than imposed.

The opening chapters address **impermanence (*Kaal*) and illusion (*Māyā*) as foundational diagnostic lenses**. Impermanence exposes the ontological fragility of all forms—body, authority, prestige, and institution—while Māyā explains the psychological refusal to accept this fragility through attachment to status, metrics, approval, and power. Within higher education leadership, these diagnostic insights illuminate why fear-driven decision-making, ethical delay, performative compliance, and prestige preservation recur so persistently. Leadership failure appears not merely as managerial inadequacy, but as existential misrecognition—acting as though authority, reputation, or institutional survival were permanent and self-securing.

Flowing from this diagnosis, the Saloks repeatedly depict moments of **social and institutional collapse**—abandonment at death, the irrelevance of wealth and relationships, the humiliation of power under time. These descriptions do not constitute a separate doctrinal concern. Rather, they function pedagogically to demonstrate consequences. Collapse is shown as the applied manifestation of unaddressed impermanence and unchecked Māyā. When leadership identity remains grounded in illusion rather than ethical preparedness, breakdown is not episodic or accidental; it is predictable.

The subsequent chapters turn decisively toward **detachment and discernment (*Bibek/Vairāg*) as ethical capacity formation**. Here, the Saloks move beyond exposure of distortion toward the cultivation of restraint, humility, vigilance, and moral courage without assurance. Detachment does not signify withdrawal from responsibility; it signifies freedom from role-identity, relationship dependency, and reputational anxiety. For leaders in higher education, this stage is transformative. Ethical action becomes possible under pressure precisely because judgment is no longer hostage to institutional fear or performative success.

The pedagogical movement reaches completion in the chapters devoted to **Naam and divine wisdom**, where ethical formation is stabilized through inner anchoring beyond gain and loss. Naam does not bypass struggle or eliminate responsibility; it removes fear as the governing force of action. In leadership terms, it corresponds to steadiness, integrity, and fearlessness that

do not depend on surveillance, reward, or external enforcement. Significantly, Naam appears neither prematurely nor excessively in Salok Mahalla 9. Its measured presence underscores a crucial Gurmat insight: liberation follows formation. Ethical freedom is not declared; it is cultivated.

Taken together, these chapters present Salok Mahalla 9 as a unified pedagogical funnel:

- **Ontological diagnosis** through impermanence and illusion
- **Demonstrated consequences** through social and institutional collapse
- **Ethical capacity formation** through detachment and discernment
- **Moral freedom and stability** through Naam and wisdom

Within this framework, ethics is not enforced through compliance mechanisms but assimilated through inner formation. Leadership integrity arises inwardly and manifests institutionally. By structuring the book around these successive stages, the study positions Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib's Saloks not as historical artefacts or devotional fragments, but as living ethical resources capable of informing contemporary academic governance and leadership formation in a profound and enduring way.

2.5 Ethical Responsibility Recentered: From Structural Critique to Inner Formation

By declining to treat social and institutional collapse as an autonomous category of analysis, this study resists the temptation to remain at the level of surface critique—whether of governance structures, administrative processes, or relational failures. Instead, it follows the ethical logic of Gurmat, which locates responsibility not primarily in systems or policies, but in consciousness, discernment, and inner freedom. Institutions, in this view, do not fail in isolation; they reflect the quality of formation—or deformation—of those who lead them.

Such a perspective allows higher education institutions to be examined not merely as sites of policy breakdown or governance deficit, but as mirrors of leadership shaped by deeper existential forces. Patterns of instability and ethical fragility are seen to arise from fear of loss, attachment to role and reputation, and the illusion-driven postponement of ethical action. These forces quietly shape decision-making under pressure, often long before any visible crisis emerges. What appears externally as administrative failure is thus revealed internally as a failure of formation.

Accordingly, ethical reform cannot be achieved through procedural correction alone. Codes, audits, and compliance mechanisms may regulate behaviour, but they cannot generate ethical clarity where existential confusion persists. Meaningful reform requires attention to the ontological and psychological roots that govern action—above all, the refusal to accept impermanence and the persistent influence of Māyā in shaping perception. Only by addressing these roots can leadership move from reactive management to ethically grounded stewardship.

Collapse as Revelation: Ethical Stability Beyond Illusion: In Salok Mahalla 9, social and institutional collapse does not function as a moral verdict pronounced upon the world, but as a mirror held up to human consciousness. Through unsparing images of abandonment, loss, and the erosion of power, **Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib** reveals not the inherent weakness of relationships or structures, but the peril of mistaking them for ultimate supports. When leaders and institutions fail, Gurmat suggests, it is not because social life is flawed by nature, but because impermanent forms have been burdened with the weight of permanence and security. True ethical stability, in this vision, arises only when impermanence is acknowledged rather than denied, when Māyā is discerned rather than obeyed, and when action is anchored in Naam and wisdom rather than fear and attachment. Leadership integrity, therefore, is not secured by insulation from loss, but by freedom from illusion. It is this freedom—cultivated through discernment and inner anchoring—that allows ethical action to endure even as forms dissolve. In offering this insight, Salok Mahalla 9 speaks not only to spiritual seekers, but to all who carry responsibility within fragile institutions, reminding them that what sustains ethical leadership is not control over outcomes, but clarity of being.

Summary

This chapter has sought to carry the ethical pedagogy of Salok Mahalla 9 out of textual analysis and into the lived terrain of higher education leadership. Building upon the foundations established in Chapter 1, it has argued that leadership failure and institutional instability cannot be understood adequately at the level of policy, procedure, or competence alone. Rather, they emerge from deeper ontological conditions that shape how leaders perceive time, authority, security, and responsibility.

Through Gurmat ontology, the chapter has shown how the denial of impermanence (*Kaal*) and the dominance of illusion (*Māyā*) quietly give rise to fear-driven governance, ethical delay, performative compliance, and the eventual collapse of social and institutional assurances. The illustrative cases demonstrate that ethical crises in universities are rarely sudden; they are disclosed moments in a longer process of existential misrecognition. Where leadership identity is anchored in reputation, visibility, or institutional permanence, fragility becomes inevitable.

In contrast, the chapter has articulated a formed leadership path grounded in discernment (*Bibek*), detachment (*Vairāg*), and inner anchoring through *Naam*. Here, ethical action is not reactive or rule-bound but assimilated—flowing from inner steadiness rather than external enforcement. Such leadership is capable of acting without assurance, enduring uncertainty without paralysis, and sustaining integrity without dependence on surveillance or reward.

The two-path model presented in this chapter clarifies that institutional outcomes are not accidental. Collapse and resilience follow predictably from the quality of leadership formation. Ethics, in this Gurmat framework, is not imposed through compliance but cultivated through existential clarity. By reframing leadership as an ontological responsibility rather than a managerial role, this chapter positions Salok Mahalla 9—articulated by **Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib**—as a living ethical resource for contemporary higher education.

Chapter 2 thus completes the movement from ethical pedagogy to ethical practice, preparing the ground for subsequent chapters that will deepen the analysis of detachment and Naam as sustaining conditions for long-term institutional integrity and moral courage in academic leadership.

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Part II

Existential Diagnosis

Before institutions fail, perception falters.: Before policy collapses, discernment weakens.

These statements express a central diagnostic insight underlying the ethical argument of this study: institutional crises rarely originate in structures alone. Long before governance mechanisms break down or policies become ineffective, a subtler failure occurs at the level of human perception and moral judgment. Institutions are not self-sustaining mechanisms; they are sustained by the interpretive and ethical capacities of the individuals who inhabit them. When those capacities weaken, institutional deterioration gradually follows.

The first assertion—*before institutions fail, perception falters*—points to the foundational role of human interpretation in institutional life. Institutions operate through decisions, judgments, and priorities formed by individuals entrusted with responsibility. When perception becomes clouded by fear, ambition, attachment, or ideological rigidity, ethical clarity begins to erode. Decisions that once reflected institutional purpose and moral responsibility gradually become reactive, self-protective, or instrumental. Over time, these misaligned decisions accumulate, producing patterns of dysfunction that are eventually recognized as institutional failure. What appears externally as organizational breakdown is therefore often the visible consequence of an earlier internal misalignment in human perception.

The second statement—*before policy collapses, discernment weakens*—extends this diagnosis into the realm of governance and regulation. Policies are frequently treated as the primary instruments for maintaining institutional order. Yet policies themselves are products of human judgment. When the capacity for discernment weakens, policies tend to become increasingly procedural, reactive, or excessively regulatory. Rather than embodying thoughtful ethical guidance, they multiply as mechanisms of control. Such proliferation often signals not strength but uncertainty: an attempt to compensate for the absence of internal moral clarity with external rules. Eventually these policies lose coherence, legitimacy, and effectiveness, resulting in the very breakdown they were intended to prevent.

Within the broader framework of this book, these dynamics reflect deeper distortions in the human condition. Fear of loss, vulnerability, and mortality—symbolically represented by **Kaal**—can drive individuals toward defensive or self-preserving decisions. Similarly, attachment to status, power, or material advantage—captured in the concept of **Māyā**—can obscure ethical priorities and distort judgment. Together, these forces weaken the faculty of **Bibek**, the capacity for moral discernment that allows individuals to distinguish truth from illusion and responsibility from self-interest.

When discernment weakens, institutions increasingly rely on external enforcement and procedural regulation. Yet no regulatory system can substitute for the absence of moral clarity. Sustainable governance therefore requires more than administrative

> efficiency or procedural compliance; it requires the formation of ethically grounded individuals capable of exercising responsible judgment. Such formation unfolds through the cultivation of discernment (**Bibek**), the development of inner freedom from attachment (**Vairāg**), and the stabilization of ethical awareness through spiritual grounding (**Naam**). Only through these capacities can individuals sustain the moral orientation necessary for institutional integrity.
>
> Seen in this light, institutional failure is not merely an organizational problem but a human one. The health of institutions ultimately reflects the ethical condition of the persons who guide them. When perception remains clear and discernment remains strong, institutions retain coherence even amid difficulty. When these inner capacities falter, no amount of regulation can prevent gradual decline. The restoration of institutional integrity therefore begins not with the multiplication of policies, but with the renewal of moral awareness within the individuals who inhabit institutional life.

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are often evaluated through measurable outcomes—rankings, governance structures, financial stability, regulatory compliance. When ethical crises emerge, investigations focus on procedural lapses, managerial inadequacy, or individual misconduct. Yet such explanations, though necessary, remain incomplete. They address the visible surface of breakdown while leaving untouched the deeper interior condition from which distortion arises.

Leadership does not operate in abstraction. It is shaped by how time is understood and how attachment is formed. Beneath institutional dynamics lie existential realities that quietly govern decision-making: the fear of impermanence and the fascination with permanence.

Ethical failure in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) is often examined through the language of governance, compliance, accountability, and reform. Policies are revised, oversight mechanisms strengthened, and leadership training programs expanded. Yet beneath procedural breakdowns lie a deeper terrain rarely addressed: the existential condition of leadership itself.

Part II turns to that terrain. It turns to that interior condition.

This section advances a foundational claim: institutional distortions do not originate solely in structural inadequacy or managerial error. They arise from unexamined existential and perceptual conditions that shape leadership from within. Before reform can be proposed, diagnosis must be undertaken. Before systems are adjusted, the inner architecture of fear and attachment must be clarified.

Chapter 3 examines **Kaal—impermanence and temporality—as the ground of existential insecurity**. Drawing from *Salok Mahalla 9* of the *Guru Granth Sahib*, composed by Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib, it argues that leadership fear is not merely situational but ontological. When impermanence is resisted rather than assimilated, insecurity intensifies. This insecurity manifests in three interrelated forms within HEIs:

- **Existential insecurity**, where authority is guarded as protection against fragility;

- **Crisis governance**, where compressed time reveals unprepared moral foundations;
- **Temporal anxiety**, where ethical delay becomes normalized under the illusion of controllable continuity.

Chapter 3 therefore establishes that fear destabilizes discernment. Under the shadow of finitude, leaders may contract courage, defer accountability, or cling defensively to authority. The chapter does not prescribe remedies; it clarifies the condition from which distortion arises. Chapter 4 turns from fear to illusion. If impermanence unsettles leadership, **Māyā stabilizes distortion through attachment**. Where insecurity reacts to loss, illusion clings to form. Again drawing upon selected saloks of *Salok Mahalla 9*, the chapter interprets Māyā as ethical misrecognition—the absolutization of transient realities such as prestige, metrics, relationships, authority, and symbolic success.

Within contemporary HEIs, this illusion assumes institutional form. It appears as:

- **Prestige fixation**, where reputation and ranking mediate ethical judgment;
- **Performative compliance**, where visible conformity substitutes for inward clarity;
- **Illusion of control**, where measurable success and administrative structure promise permanence within inherently unstable systems.

Chapter 4 demonstrates that attachment reshapes perception before it produces misconduct. Ethical blindness does not erupt suddenly; it is normalized gradually through institutional incentives and symbolic rewards. Māyā sustains distortion not through overt corruption, but through reassurance.

Taken together, Chapters 3 and 4 articulate a dual existential diagnosis of leadership in higher education:

- Fear destabilizes under the pressure of impermanence.
- Illusion stabilizes distortion through attachment.

Both weaken discernment. Both precede policy failure. Both operate prior to visible crisis.

The objective of Part II is therefore not reform but clarification. By examining Kaal and Māyā as existential and ethical categories, this section seeks to illuminate the inner conditions that shape leadership behavior in HEIs. Without such diagnosis, institutional reform risks addressing symptoms while leaving roots untouched.

Only when fear is recognized and illusion unveiled can ethical formation begin with sobriety rather than reaction. Part II thus provides the philosophical and theological groundwork upon which the subsequent constructive vision of the book will stand.

Diagnosis precedes renewal.: Clarity precedes reform.
This section attends to clarity.

These statements express an important methodological and ethical principle guiding the argument of this study: meaningful transformation cannot occur without first understanding the underlying condition that requires transformation. Renewal—whether personal, institutional, or civilizational—does not begin with immediate action or structural change. It begins with diagnosis: the careful recognition of the distortions, vulnerabilities, and contradictions that shape the present condition. Without such diagnosis, attempts at reform risk addressing symptoms rather than causes, producing temporary adjustments rather than lasting transformation.

The first assertion, *diagnosis precedes renewal*, emphasizes that renewal is fundamentally a reflective process. Before individuals or institutions can restore coherence and integrity, they must first confront the realities that have led to misalignment or decline. This diagnostic phase requires intellectual honesty and moral courage, for it involves acknowledging the limitations of prevailing assumptions, practices, and forms of authority. In the absence of such recognition, reform initiatives often reproduce the very patterns that generated the problem. Renewal therefore depends upon a disciplined process of critical reflection that identifies the deeper forces shaping human conduct and institutional behavior.

The second statement, *clarity precedes reform*, builds upon this diagnostic insight by highlighting the role of moral and existential clarity in guiding constructive change. Reform is not merely a matter of replacing one set of policies with another. Genuine reform requires a renewed understanding of purpose, responsibility, and ethical orientation. When clarity is absent, reform efforts frequently become reactive, fragmented, or excessively procedural. Institutions may multiply policies, restructure administrative arrangements, or intensify regulation, yet these measures rarely address the deeper ethical misalignment that undermines institutional life.

Within the conceptual framework of this book, the process of diagnosis reveals the distortions affecting the human condition—particularly the influence of fear and attachment. These forces, symbolically articulated through the concepts of **Kaal** and **Māyā**, shape patterns of perception and decision-making that gradually weaken ethical discernment. When individuals become governed by fear of loss or by attachment to status and possession, their capacity to perceive ethical reality becomes compromised. The result is not only personal disorientation but also institutional misalignment, as decisions increasingly reflect anxiety or ambition rather than principled judgment.

The recovery of clarity therefore requires the cultivation of **Bibek**, the faculty of discernment that allows individuals to distinguish between appearance and reality, impulse and responsibility. Through discernment, individuals begin to recognize the distortions that have shaped their judgments and actions. This recognition in turn enables the development of **Vairāg**, a form of inner detachment that frees the individual from the compulsive influence of fear and attachment. Only when these capacities are formed can reform acquire a stable foundation. Without discernment and detachment, reform remains external and procedural; with them, reform becomes ethically grounded and internally sustained.

The culmination of this process lies in **Naam**, understood here as the ontological anchoring of human consciousness in a deeper spiritual awareness. Such anchoring provides the inner steadiness necessary for maintaining clarity over time. Reform that emerges from this foundation does not merely restructure institutional mechanisms; it

realigns human action with ethical responsibility and spiritual orientation. From this alignment arises the possibility of **moral freedom**, the condition in which individuals and institutions act with integrity rather than compulsion.

Seen in this light, diagnosis and clarity are not preliminary technical steps but essential stages in the ethical journey from distortion to renewal. They create the conditions under which reform becomes both meaningful and sustainable. By recognizing that renewal must begin with honest diagnosis and that reform must rest upon moral clarity, the framework of this study emphasizes that enduring transformation emerges from the cultivation of ethical awareness rather than from the mere adjustment of institutional structures.

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Chapter 3

Kaal: Impermanence and the Fear of Leadership

Introduction

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) across the world are experiencing a gradual erosion of ethical leadership, manifested through fear-driven governance, prestige-induced arrogance, institutional conformity, and moral fatigue among administrators and teachers. Despite the proliferation of regulatory frameworks, codes of conduct, accountability mechanisms, and performance metrics, ethical failure persists—most visibly under conditions of pressure, hierarchy, and reputational risk. Such failures are rarely the result of ignorance of rules or absence of policy; rather, they emerge when fear, attachment to position, and anxiety about institutional survival override moral judgment and inner conviction.

This chapter argues that these patterns cannot be adequately understood—or addressed—through managerial, procedural, or compliance-based explanations alone. At a deeper level, leadership fear in contemporary HEIs reflects an **existential disorder**: a failure to assimilate impermanence. When authority, identity, and continuity are implicitly assumed to be stable, leaders experience threat, loss, and crisis not as structural conditions of institutional life, but as personal dangers to be resisted, deferred, or concealed. Ethical compromise thus appears not as moral collapse, but as a strategy of existential self-preservation.

Against this background, the chapter turns to the teachings of **Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib**, articulated in *Salok Mahalla 9* of the *Guru Granth Sahib*. These saloks present death (*Kaal*) and impermanence not as theological abstractions or eschatological warnings, but as radical disclosures of reality. *Kaal* functions here as an ethical and existential teacher: exposing illusion, dissolving false security, and revealing the fragility of ego, role, prestige, and attachment. Rather than prescribing conduct, the saloks diagnose the conditions under which fear arises and moral clarity dissolves.

Accordingly, this chapter integrates two interrelated dimensions.

1. First, it identifies specific ethical and leadership problems faced by administrators, leaders, and teachers in contemporary HEIs—particularly those rooted in fear, delay, conformity, and over-identification with authority.
2. Second, it systematically interprets Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib's teachings on death (*Kaal*) and impermanence, with explicit reference to individual saloks, to illuminate how these teachings expose the existential roots of leadership fear. The emphasis throughout is diagnostic rather than prescriptive: the chapter does not propose solutions,

reforms, or leadership models, but seeks to clarify the underlying condition from which ethical distortion arises.

In doing so, Chapter 3 reframes leadership fear not as a moral weakness or managerial failure, but as a symptom of unassimilated impermanence. Where death is forgotten, authority seeks permanence; where time is denied, action is endlessly deferred; and where continuity is presumed, crisis becomes catastrophic. By recovering *Kaal* as an existential horizon rather than an external threat, this chapter prepares the ground for later discussions of ethical formation and institutional response, while itself remaining resolutely focused on diagnosis.

Part-I

3.1 Primary Ethical Distortions as Existential Conditions of Leadership

In contemporary Higher Education Institutions, ethical decision-making rarely occurs in neutral conditions. Administrators and teachers operate within systems marked by asymmetrical power, career precarity, political oversight, and reputational vulnerability. Under such conditions, fear becomes normalized rather than exceptional. Table 1 demonstrates that what are often labelled as "ethical lapses" are, at a deeper level, **adaptive responses to perceived existential threat**: fear of loss, fear of isolation, fear of irrelevance, and fear of institutional collapse.

The term *primary ethical distortion* therefore refers to **pre-reflective orientations of consciousness** that shape how leaders perceive risk, time, authority, and responsibility. Fear-driven decision-making, attachment to role and prestige, ethical delay, suppression of dissent, and conformity are not episodic choices; they are sustained modes of being that narrow moral vision. Once established, these dispositions function automatically, often beneath the threshold of explicit ethical deliberation.

Crucially, these distortions are **institutionally reinforced**. Figure 1 illustrates how organizational structures—performance metrics, hierarchical authority, procedural formalism, and reputational incentives—stabilize fear rather than resolve it. Over time, institutions reward compliance, delay, and risk-avoidance while penalizing moral clarity that disrupts equilibrium. What begins as individual anxiety becomes embedded as organizational culture. Ethical distortion thus migrates from personal conscience to institutional norm.

Table 1 further shows that these distortions are interconnected rather than isolated. Fear of loss feeds attachment to position; attachment to position fuels prestige-induced arrogance; arrogance enables ethical blindness; ethical blindness justifies delay; delay normalizes injustice. The result is not overt ethical collapse, but **managed ethical erosion**—a condition in which institutions continue to function administratively while moral judgment steadily deteriorates.

This diagnostic framing challenges the assumption that ethical failure in HEIs can be corrected primarily through additional rules, audits, or compliance mechanisms. Such approaches often intensify the very anxieties they seek to control by increasing surveillance, risk-aversion, and procedural dependency. When fear governs leadership consciousness, ethical clarity is displaced by self-protective rationality.

At this point, the relevance of **Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib** becomes existential rather than doctrinal. The saloks of *Salok Mahalla 9* do not address ethics at the level of regulation or role expectation; they interrogate the conditions under which fear, attachment, and ego arise in the first place. Before impermanence (*Kaal*) is remembered, leadership seeks continuity; before death is acknowledged, authority demands exemption; before time is accepted as finite, ethical action is deferred.

Accordingly, Figure 1 and Table 1 establish the *problematic field* within which the teachings on impermanence will later be interpreted. They do not yet offer resolution. Instead, they make visible the existential terrain of leadership fear: a terrain shaped by insecurity, reinforced by institutions, and sustained by the silent denial of impermanence. Figure 1 and Table 1 should not be read as inventories of individual moral failure, nor as lists of administrative incompetence. They articulate a deeper diagnosis: **primary ethical distortions are inner dispositions that deform moral judgment under pressure**, particularly within hierarchical, reputation-sensitive, and risk-averse institutional environments. These distortions arise not primarily from malice or ignorance, but from unresolved existential anxiety—specifically, anxiety generated by forgotten or unassimilated impermanence.

Problem Caption	Description of the Problem (Empathetic & Contextualized)	Ethical Challenge in HEIs	Primary Ethical Distortion	Why this Distortion Fits
1. Fear-Driven Decision Making	In many HEIs, decisions are shaped less by ethical judgment and more by fear—fear of job loss, damaged reputation, funding withdrawal, political reprisal, or administrative backlash. Academic leaders and teachers often operate under sustained pressure, leading them to comply with questionable	Fear-driven decision making due to job insecurity, political pressure, or reputational risk	**Fear of Loss (Abhinivesha)**	Ethical judgment collapses when survival anxiety overrides conscience

Problem Caption	Description of the Problem (Empathetic & Contextualized)	Ethical Challenge in HEIs	Primary Ethical Distortion	Why this Distortion Fits
	directives even when they recognize ethical concerns. Over time, fear becomes normalized, suppressing moral courage and narrowing the space for principled action.			
2. Over-Identification with Position, Authority, and Title	Academic roles such as Vice-Chancellor, Dean, Head, or Professor gradually become intertwined with personal identity. This over-identification fosters insecurity around succession, resistance to critique, and power-hoarding. Decisions begin to prioritize self-preservation and status maintenance rather than the long-term health and mission of the institution.	Over-identification with administrative authority, title, or position	**Ego-Identification with Role**	The self is falsely equated with office, rank, or designation
3. Ethical Compromise Due to Relationship Dependencies	Universities rely heavily on professional networks, collegial relationships, and informal alliances. While relationships are essential, over-dependence on them can distort ethical judgment. Fear of social exclusion, loss of support, or professional isolation often leads to silence in the face of	Ethical compromise due to dependence on relationships, alliances, or patronage	**Attachment (Moh)**	Moral agency is surrendered to relational security

Problem Caption	Description of the Problem (Empathetic & Contextualized)	Ethical Challenge in HEIs	Primary Ethical Distortion	Why this Distortion Fits
	wrongdoing and selective enforcement of institutional norms.			
4. Suppression of Dissent and Whistle-Blowing	Many HEIs lack robust protections for dissenting voices. Administrators and teachers may hesitate to question authority, expose misconduct, or challenge dominant narratives due to fear of retaliation, marginalization, stalled careers, or reputational harm. This produces cultures of silence, denial, and unresolved harm rather than open inquiry.	Suppression of dissent and whistle-blowing	**Fear of Isolation**	Truth is silenced to preserve belonging and safety
5. Prestige-Induced Arrogance and Ethical Blindness	Academic prestige—measured through rank, citations, awards, or institutional reputation—can unintentionally foster arrogance. Seniority and recognition sometimes function as shields against accountability, discouraging self-reflection, intellectual humility, and openness to correction. Ethical blind spots emerge where prestige substitutes for integrity.	Prestige-induced arrogance among senior administrators and faculty	**Pride (Ahankār)**	Status becomes a shield against accountability

Problem Caption	Description of the Problem (Empathetic & Contextualized)	Ethical Challenge in HEIs	Primary Ethical Distortion	Why this Distortion Fits
6. Chronic Ethical Delay and Procrastination	Ethical issues such as harassment, discrimination, academic misconduct, or governance failures are frequently postponed. While delays are often justified as procedural caution or due process, they function in practice as avoidance strategies. Prolonged inaction allows harm to continue, signals institutional indifference, and normalizes ethical erosion.	Unequal application of rules and ethical standards	**Power Entitlement**	Authority is mistaken for exemption
7. Unequal Application of Rules and Standards	Rules and policies in HEIs are often applied unevenly. Senior administrators, influential faculty, or external stakeholders may receive informal exemptions, while junior or marginalized members face strict enforcement. Such inconsistency undermines trust, corrodes fairness, and damages the moral credibility of the institution.	Ethical delay under procedural or bureaucratic justifications	**Avoidance through Rationalization**	Delay masks unwillingness to confront moral cost
8. Lack of Ethical Preparedness for Crisis Situations	Many academic leaders and teachers enter crises—political pressure, public controversy,	Moral silence driven by fear of isolation or retaliation	**Dependency on Approval**	External validation replaces inner conviction

Problem Caption	Description of the Problem (Empathetic & Contextualized)	Ethical Challenge in HEIs	Primary Ethical Distortion	Why this Distortion Fits
	institutional scandal—without prior ethical preparation. Failures often arise not from ill intent but from unclear values, absence of rehearsed responses, and reliance on reactive decision-making under stress.			
9. Leadership Driven by Metrics Rather Than Meaning	Increasing emphasis on rankings, performance indicators, funding targets, and reputational management shifts leadership focus toward quantifiable outputs. Ethical considerations, educational purpose, and human impact become secondary. Decision-making becomes instrumental, reducing education to metrics rather than moral formation.	Leadership collapse during crises	**Unpreparedness of Conscience**	Ethics has not been rehearsed before pressure
10. Moral Fatigue, Burnout, and Inner Disorientation	Prolonged exposure to institutional pressure, unresolved conflict, and ethical compromise leads to emotional exhaustion among academic leaders and teachers. Without inner anchoring, individuals experience cynicism, disengagement, and	Excessive focus on metrics, rankings, and performative success	**Instrumentalization of Purpose**	Means replace meaning; outcomes replace values

Problem Caption	Description of the Problem (Empathetic & Contextualized)	Ethical Challenge in HEIs	Primary Ethical Distortion	Why this Distortion Fits
	moral numbness, resulting in mechanical compliance rather than principled leadership.			
11. Institutional Cultures of Fear and Compliance	Over time, fear becomes embedded in organizational culture rather than remaining an individual experience. Conformity is rewarded, questioning is discouraged, and risk-avoidance shapes behavior. Such cultures undermine academic freedom, creativity, and ethical deliberation.	Ethical blindness created by seniority and reputation	**Moral Complacency**	Past merit is assumed to guarantee present integrity
12. Erosion of Ethical Leadership and Academic Freedom	The cumulative impact of fear, attachment to power, prestige, delay, and unpreparedness weakens ethical leadership. Academic freedom becomes fragile and selectively protected, dependent on individuals rather than structurally guaranteed by the institution.	Burnout, moral fatigue, and inner disorientation among faculty and leaders	**Loss of Inner Anchoring**	Without Naam / inner grounding, endurance fails

Table 1: Ethical and Leadership Challenges in Contemporary Higher Education Institutions

Primary ethical distortions refer to inner dispositions that deform moral judgment under pressure.
These are not individual moral failures alone but are often institutionally reinforced.

Figure 1. Conceptual architecture of the study linking ethical challenges in higher education, Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib's teachings on impermanence, and leadership formation outcomes

3.2 Existential Insecurity

Existential insecurity refers to a persistent condition of inner instability that arises when leadership identity is unconsciously grounded in assumptions of permanence—of position, authority, recognition, or continuity. In contemporary Higher Education Institutions, this insecurity often remains unarticulated, masked by procedural rationality and professional competence. Yet it exerts a decisive influence on judgment, particularly under conditions of pressure, uncertainty, and threat.

Unlike situational fear, which is episodic and reactive, existential insecurity is structural and enduring. It shapes how leaders perceive time, risk, and responsibility even in the absence of immediate crisis. When authority is experienced as something that must be preserved rather than temporarily held, decision-making becomes oriented toward self-protection. Ethical considerations are not rejected outright; they are subordinated to the more basic imperative of survival—personal, professional, or institutional.

This insecurity is intensified by the organizational ecology of HEIs. Rankings, funding cycles, contractual precarity, political scrutiny, and reputational exposure create an environment in which continuity is never guaranteed but constantly sought. The result is a paradoxical condition: leaders operate within institutions dedicated to knowledge and reflection, yet are often unable to confront the most basic existential fact governing their roles—impermanence. The denial of impermanence does not remove insecurity; it multiplies it.

Existential insecurity also explains the prevalence of over-identification with role and status. When the self becomes fused with office, designation, or institutional prestige, any challenge to authority is experienced as a threat to identity rather than as a matter for deliberation. Critique becomes destabilizing, dissent appears dangerous, and accountability feels punitive. Ethical judgment narrows not because leaders lack values, but because insecurity constricts the space in which those values can be enacted.

At this level, fear is not primarily fear of punishment or failure, but fear of dissolution—of losing coherence, relevance, or standing. Such fear rarely announces itself explicitly. Instead, it manifests indirectly: through excessive caution, procedural delay, reliance on precedent, deferral to hierarchy, or silence in moments that demand clarity. Existential insecurity thus produces what appears outwardly as rational governance, but inwardly functions as avoidance of finitude.

It is within this condition that the teachings of **Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib** acquire diagnostic significance. In *Salok Mahalla 9*, impermanence is not introduced as a moral injunction or spiritual consolation, but as an unyielding disclosure of reality. Death (*Kaal*) reveals the instability of all forms—body, role, power, and reputation—without exception. From this perspective, existential insecurity is not an accidental weakness of leadership; it is the predictable outcome of grounding identity in what cannot endure.

Importantly, this diagnosis does not moralize insecurity, nor does it individualize blame. Existential insecurity is cultivated and sustained by institutional contexts that reward continuity, control, and reputation while marginalizing vulnerability, finitude, and loss. Leaders are rarely given the conceptual or symbolic resources to confront impermanence honestly. In its absence, fear fills the void.

Thus, existential insecurity constitutes the underlying condition from which the primary ethical distortions identified earlier emerge. Fear-driven governance, attachment to prestige, suppression of dissent, and ethical delay are not independent failures; they are expressions of a deeper unsettledness in the face of time, loss, and non-permanence. Before impermanence is brought into consciousness, leadership remains trapped in the anxious pursuit of stability within an inherently unstable world.

3.3 Crisis Governance: Insecurity under the Compression of Time

Crisis governance refers to the mode of leadership that emerges when ordinary temporal buffers collapse and decision-making is forced into immediacy. In Higher Education Institutions, crises may take many forms—political intervention, public controversy, institutional scandal, financial shock, or sudden leadership transition. What unites these situations is not their content, but their effect on time. Crisis compresses duration, interrupts routine, and renders deferral impossible.

Under such conditions, existential insecurity becomes visible. Practices that ordinarily appear as prudence, consultation, or procedural rigor are stripped of their protective function. The leader can no longer rely on extended deliberation, incremental adjustment, or symbolic compliance. Crisis governance thus reveals not primarily administrative competence, but the prior settlement—or avoidance—of impermanence.

In non-crisis conditions, insecurity is often managed through temporal expansion. Decisions are postponed, committees convened, inquiries commissioned, and precedents consulted. Time functions as insulation. Crisis disrupts this insulation by imposing urgency without guarantee. The future cannot be stabilized, and continuity cannot be assumed. What remains exposed is the leader's relationship to uncertainty itself.

It is at this juncture that *Kaal*—time as finitude rather than duration—enters governance experience. The teachings of **Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib**, particularly in *Salok Mahalla 9*, articulate this condition with austere clarity: death arrives without negotiation, warning, or regard for status. In existential terms, crisis mirrors this structure. It arrives uninvited, disregards hierarchy, and demands response without assurance of outcome.

Where impermanence has not been assimilated, crisis governance tends toward distortion. Fear intensifies, and judgment narrows. Leaders may cling to authority, suppress dissent, prioritize reputational containment, or retreat into procedural formalism precisely when clarity is most needed. These responses are not calculated strategies; they are reflexes shaped by insecurity confronting the sudden loss of temporal control.

Conversely, crisis does not *create* ethical collapse; it exposes its conditions. The same attachments, ego investments, and anxieties that remain latent in ordinary time are amplified when duration contracts. What had been managed through delay becomes visible as avoidance; what had been framed as neutrality reveals itself as fear; what had appeared as stability is disclosed as dependence on continuity.

Crisis governance thus functions as an existential test—not of virtue, but of orientation toward time. When leadership identity depends on longevity, predictability, or control, the sudden presence of finitude destabilizes judgment. Ethical action becomes threatening not because it is difficult, but because it accelerates exposure to loss. Silence, delay, or conformity appear safer than decisiveness, even when harm is evident.

Importantly, this analysis resists the temptation to evaluate crisis outcomes in terms of success or failure. The diagnostic focus lies instead on visibility. Crisis makes explicit what was already operative but concealed: the extent to which leadership consciousness has relied on the deferral of impermanence. In this sense, crisis is not an aberration within governance; it is a moment of disclosure.

By revealing how leaders respond when time can no longer be managed, crisis governance illuminates the existential roots of fear in institutional life. The next section will extend this analysis by examining **temporal anxiety**—the chronic condition that precedes crisis, in which leaders attempt to master time through delay, procedure, and control, thereby deepening the very insecurity they seek to escape.

3.4 Temporal Anxiety: Delay, Deferral, and the Illusion of Control

Temporal anxiety refers to a chronic condition in which leaders experience time not as a finite horizon to be inhabited, but as a threat to be managed, postponed, or controlled. Unlike crisis governance, where time is abruptly compressed, temporal anxiety operates in extended duration. It is the condition that precedes crisis—the background orientation through which leaders attempt to neutralize uncertainty by stretching time, multiplying procedures, and deferring decisive action.

In contemporary Higher Education Institutions, temporal anxiety manifests as an overreliance on process. Ethical issues are rarely denied outright; instead, they are deferred. Committees are formed, reports commissioned, consultations extended, and timelines repeatedly revised. Such practices are often justified in the language of due diligence and institutional prudence. Yet existentially, they function as strategies of postponement, allowing leaders to avoid confronting loss, conflict, or irreversibility.

This anxiety arises from an implicit assumption that time can be mastered. When leadership identity is invested in continuity—of office, reputation, or institutional stability—action becomes dangerous because it risks closing off future options. Delay appears safer than decision, not because it resolves uncertainty, but because it preserves the illusion of control. Temporal anxiety thus transforms time from a condition of responsibility into a mechanism of avoidance.

From an existential standpoint, this mode of governance reflects a refusal to accept finitude. Action is deferred in the hope that circumstances will change, risks will diminish, or responsibility will dissipate. Yet such hope is structurally unstable, because it depends on an imagined future in which impermanence no longer threatens. The longer action is postponed, the more anxiety intensifies, producing cycles of hesitation that masquerade as rational administration.

The teachings of **Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib**, as expressed in *Salok Mahalla 9*, confront this condition directly by exposing the unpredictability of time. Death (*Kaal*) arrives without regard for preparation, intention, or institutional timetable. In this light, delay is revealed not as prudence but as self-deception. Temporal anxiety thrives precisely because impermanence is acknowledged abstractly but resisted existentially.

Importantly, temporal anxiety should not be confused with urgency. Urgency presumes clarity of action within limited time; temporal anxiety, by contrast, produces paralysis. It multiplies options, prolongs deliberation, and seeks refuge in procedural continuity. Ethical judgment becomes suspended between an unacknowledged fear of loss and an unexamined faith in future resolution.

This condition also explains why institutions may appear stable while remaining ethically stagnant. Time continues to pass, roles are maintained, and processes function, yet moral responsibility is repeatedly deferred. Temporal anxiety thus enables ethical erosion without overt rupture. Harm persists not through decisive wrongdoing, but through sustained inaction. As an existential diagnosis, temporal anxiety completes the triad with existential insecurity and crisis governance. Where insecurity establishes fear as a background condition, and crisis exposes it through compression of time, temporal anxiety sustains fear by expanding time indefinitely. Together, these conditions describe how leadership fear is reproduced not through isolated failures, but through a continuous misrelation to impermanence.

Part - II

3.5. Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib's Vision of Death and Impermanence: (Salok Mahalla 9 as Existential Diagnosis)

This part of the chapter turns from institutional symptomatology to existential disclosure. Having identified fear, delay, conformity, and attachment as structural distortions of leadership consciousness, the analysis now examines how *Salok Mahalla 9* exposes the underlying condition from which these distortions arise. The saloks do not address governance, institutions, or leadership roles directly; instead, they interrogate the assumptions about time, identity, and continuity that silently govern human action under pressure.

Figure 2 provides a conceptual visualization of this movement: death (*Kaal*) operates as an ethical pedagogy not by prescribing conduct, but by dismantling illusion. Table 2 complements this figure by mapping contemporary leadership distortions onto specific saloks, showing how each distortion corresponds to a misrelation to impermanence. Together, they frame *Salok Mahalla 9* as a diagnostic text—one that reveals why leadership fear persists even in rule-saturated institutions.

3.6 Impermanence as Philosophical Disclosure, Not Moral Admonition

Salok Mahalla 9 occupies a distinctive position within Sikh scripture for its austerity and philosophical directness. Composed during a period of political repression and culminating in the martyrdom of **Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib**, these saloks neither plead for reform nor offer

consolation. They instruct by exposure. Death (*Kaal*) is not presented as a future event to be feared, but as a present truth that destabilizes illusion. **Note** that the Table 1 integrates empirical ethical challenges in contemporary higher education (Part I) with scriptural insights from Salok Mahalla 9 and translates them into leadership resolutions (Part II). The mapping is conceptual rather than prescriptive and is intended to support ethical formation rather than doctrinal instruction.

Figure 2. Death (Kaal) as an ethical pedagogy in Salok Mahalla 9: dismantling illusion and awakening moral clarity.

This orientation is crucial for understanding their relevance to leadership fear. The saloks do not ask how leaders should behave; they ask what leaders have forgotten. By stripping away metaphysical comfort and institutional mediation, *Salok Mahalla 9* reveals impermanence as the ground condition of existence. Leadership fear, in this light, is not a failure of courage or ethics, but a failure of perception—an inability to live within finitude without seeking exemption.

Figure 2 situates this philosophical stance at the center of ethical pedagogy: illusion precedes distortion, and distortion precedes ethical collapse. The saloks therefore function diagnostically, illuminating the unseen assumptions that govern action before moral reasoning begins.

Problem Identified in HEIs (Part I)	**Relevant Salok(s) (Salok Mahalla 9)**	**Core Teaching on Death & Impermanence**	**Ethical Resolution for HEIs (Part II Insight)**
Fear-driven decision making due to job insecurity, political pressure, or reputational risk	Salok 7, 13, 30, 46, 52	Death (Kaal) is inevitable, impartial, and unpredictable; fear-based living is illusory	Leaders act ethically without fear, knowing authority, position, and life itself are temporary

Over-identification with administrative authority, title, or position	Salok 5, 21, 37, 39	The body and all forms are temporary; identity rooted in form is ignorance	Leadership is exercised as stewardship rather than ownership; humility replaces entitlement
Ethical compromise due to dependence on relationships, alliances, or patronage	Salok 2, 9, 18, 44	Worldly relationships do not accompany one at death; attachment breeds sorrow	Administrators and teachers gain ethical independence and resist pressure from factions
Suppression of dissent and whistle-blowing	Salok 17, 30, 52	Impermanence demands moral urgency; delay is self-deception	Institutions respond promptly to injustice rather than postponing action for convenience
Prestige-induced arrogance among senior administrators and faculty	Salok 1, 24, 30, 46	Death dismantles pride, status, and intellectual vanity	Academic humility is restored; accountability applies equally at all levels
Unequal application of rules and ethical standards	Salok 7, 13, 46, 52	Death makes no distinction between king and subject	Ethical equity is reinforced; policies apply uniformly regardless of rank or influence
Ethical delay under procedural or bureaucratic justifications	Salok 17, 30	Life's uncertainty demands readiness and immediate ethical clarity	Ethical responsiveness replaces procedural procrastination
Moral silence driven by fear of isolation or retaliation	Salok 2, 18, 44	Attachment to social security creates suffering	Moral courage and principled solitude are normalized
Leadership collapse during crises	Salok 21, 39, 52	Wisdom lies in preparedness before crisis arises	Ethical readiness becomes a leadership competency
Excessive focus on metrics, rankings, and performative success	Salok 1, 5, 37	External appearances and achievements are fleeting	Meaning-based leadership supersedes metric-driven governance
Ethical blindness created by seniority and reputation	Salok 24, 30	Sudden death exposes illusion instantly	Seniority does not excuse ethical failure; vigilance is continuous
Burnout, moral fatigue, and inner disorientation among faculty and leaders	Salok 9, 39, 52	Naam provides inner anchoring beyond fear and exhaustion	Inner stability enables sustained ethical engagement
Culture of silence and conformity	Salok 2, 17	Attachment to belonging inhibits truth	Truth-speaking is normalized even in isolation
Loss of academic freedom	Salok 7, 13, 46	Power and oppression dissolve before Kaal	Fearless scholarship is encouraged

Instrumentalization of education	Salok 39	Human birth is rare and must not be wasted	Education is reclaimed as moral and ethical formation
Ethical collapse masked by formal compliance	Salok 30, 52	Illusion persists until shattered by reality	Ethical integrity is evaluated under pressure, not appearance
Leadership motivated by longevity rather than legacy	Salok 21, 37	Time erodes all physical continuity	Leaders prioritize legacy of integrity over tenure
Injustice normalized as "institutional necessity"	Salok 17, 30	Impermanence invalidates moral postponement	Ethical action is treated as non-negotiable
Absence of ethical preparedness in leadership training	Salok 21, 39, 52	Preparedness defines wisdom	Leadership formation emphasizes readiness and conscience
Fragmentation between personal values and institutional roles	Salok 9, 39	Without inner anchoring, life is empty	Integration of personal conscience with institutional action

Table 2. Mapping Ethical Challenges in Higher Education to Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib's Teachings on Death and Impermanence and Their Leadership Implications

3.7 Kaal as Absolute and Impartial: The Collapse of Hierarchical Security

A recurring assertion in *Salok Mahalla 9* is the absolute and impartial nature of death:

- Salok 7 affirms that time overcomes all.
- Salok 13 declares that even the mighty fall.
- Salok 17 exposes the unreliability of youth and strength.
- Salok 30 insists on death's unpredictability.
- Salok 46 levels king and poor alike.
- Salok 52 portrays time as the great humbler of beings.

Existentially, these saloks dismantle the fantasy of hierarchical exemption. Authority, status, and power do not negotiate with *Kaal*. In institutional contexts, however, leadership often operates on the tacit assumption that rank confers insulation—from consequence, scrutiny, or loss. Table 2 shows how this assumption underlies fear-driven decision-making and unequal application of rules.

When death is forgotten, hierarchy becomes a shield against anxiety. Fear then emerges not from ethical uncertainty, but from the threatened collapse of that shield. *Kaal* exposes this fear by rendering all positions provisional. Leadership insecurity thus appears not as weakness, but as the inevitable result of grounding identity in structures that cannot endure.

3.8 The Temporariness of Body and Role: Identity as a Source of Fear

Several saloks detach identity from bodily form:

- Salok 5 warns against reliance on the decaying body.
- Salok 21 declares physical form perishable.
- Salok 37 describes the fading of beauty and youth.
- Salok 39 laments the neglect of rare human birth.

These teachings extend beyond the biological body to all forms of embodied identity. In the context of HEIs, academic roles function analogously to bodies: necessary, visible, and temporally bounded. Table 2 demonstrates how over-identification with authority, title, or designation corresponds to fear of loss when impermanence intrudes.

Existentially, fear intensifies when identity is mistaken for form. When the self is fused with office, critique becomes annihilating, succession becomes threatening, and accountability becomes destabilizing. *Salok Mahalla 9* exposes this condition by reminding the reader that all forms—including institutional ones—are transient. Leadership fear thus originates not in ethical ambiguity, but in misplaced identity.

3.9 Attachment to Relationships: Fear of Isolation and Ethical Dependence

Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib repeatedly asserts that no relationship accompanies the soul:

- Salok 2 characterizes worldly ties as fragile.
- Salok 9 declares their insufficiency without inner grounding.
- Salok 18 links attachment with grief.
- Salok 44 denies salvific power to wealth and kin.

These saloks diagnose a fundamental source of leadership fear: dependence on relational security. Table 2 links this attachment to ethical compromise, suppression of dissent, and cultures of silence. Fear here is not fear of wrongdoing, but fear of isolation—of losing alliances, approval, or belonging.

Existentially, such fear arises when relationships are burdened with providing permanence. When leaders rely on networks to stabilize identity, ethical independence becomes threatening. *Salok Mahalla 9* does not condemn relationships; it exposes the anxiety that arises when they are expected to outlast impermanence.

3.10 Ego and Prestige: The Illusion of Continuity

Several saloks confront ego directly:

- Salok 1 warns that pride blinds understanding.

- Salok 24 portrays death as the humbler of arrogance.
- Salok 30 describes sudden death shattering illusion.

In institutional life, prestige often functions as a substitute for permanence. Reputation, seniority, and recognition promise continuity beyond vulnerability. Table 2 demonstrates how such prestige produces ethical blindness and selective accountability.

Existentially, ego thrives where death is unremembered. When impermanence is excluded from consciousness, prestige appears durable and self-justifying. *Kaal* interrupts this illusion by revealing the fragility beneath acclaim. Leadership fear here emerges not from ethical demand, but from the threatened exposure of emptiness beneath status.

3.11 Impermanence and the Anxiety of Delay

Saloks 17, 30, and 52 repeatedly emphasize the unpredictability of time. Their force lies not in urgency, but in disclosure: delay is revealed as denial. Table 2 maps this insight onto ethical procrastination, procedural deferral, and injustice normalized as necessity.

Existentially, delay functions as a strategy to avoid finitude. Leaders defer action in the hope that time will absorb responsibility. Yet impermanence exposes the futility of this hope. Fear intensifies precisely because time cannot be secured. The saloks do not demand speed; they dismantle the fantasy that postponement resolves anxiety.

3.12 Preparation and Naam: The Exposure of Inner Emptiness

Saloks 21, 39, and 52 associate wisdom with preparation, while Saloks 9 and 39 expose the emptiness of life without inner anchoring (*Naam*). In diagnostic terms, *Naam* does not appear here as a solution, but as a criterion of exposure. Table 2 shows how burnout, moral fatigue, and fragmentation arise where inner grounding is absent.

Existentially, leadership fear intensifies when action is unmoored from inner coherence. Without anchoring, impermanence appears catastrophic rather than truthful. *Salok Mahalla 9* exposes this condition by contrasting preparedness with dispersion, fullness with exhaustion—not prescribing formation, but revealing lack.

Summary

Kaal: Impermanence and the Fear of Leadership: Chapter 3 has advanced a central thesis: the ethical distortions visible in contemporary higher education leadership are not merely managerial failures, regulatory gaps, or moral weaknesses. They are symptoms of a deeper existential disorder rooted in the unassimilated reality of impermanence.

The first part of the chapter examined the internal architecture of leadership fear within Higher Education Institutions. It identified three interrelated manifestations:

- **Existential Insecurity** – the anxiety arising from over-identification with position, recognition, and institutional continuity.
- **Crisis Governance** – the exposure of this insecurity under temporal compression, where fear displaces ethical clarity.
- **Temporal Anxiety** – the persistent effort to secure permanence through delay, proceduralism, prestige, or legacy management.

Together, these distortions revealed that fear-driven governance is sustained by illusions of stability: stability of role, of hierarchy, of alliances, and of time itself. Ethical erosion in HEIs thus appears less as ignorance of rules and more as a crisis of existential grounding.

The second part of the chapter turned to *Salok Mahalla 9* of the **Guru Granth Sahib**, composed by **Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib**, and interpreted its teachings on death (*Kaal*) and impermanence as a diagnostic framework. The saloks do not prescribe administrative reform, nor do they construct a leadership model. Instead, they dismantle the illusions that generate fear:

- Death is absolute and impartial, collapsing hierarchical exemption.
- The body—and by extension all forms, including institutional roles—is temporary.
- Relationships and prestige cannot secure permanence.
- Delay is exposed as denial in the face of uncertainty.
- Ego survives only where death is forgotten.
- Inner anchoring (*Naam*) reveals the difference between preparedness and dispersion.

The chapter therefore concludes that leadership fear is fundamentally existential before it is institutional. When impermanence is resisted, fear intensifies; when identity is fused with role, insecurity becomes structural; when time is treated as negotiable, ethical delay becomes normalized. The crisis in higher education leadership is thus inseparable from a crisis in the human relation to finitude.

By interpreting death not as catastrophe but as disclosure, *Salok Mahalla 9* reorients the discussion of leadership from performance to perception. Ethical clarity emerges not from new policies, but from a transformed understanding of temporality, identity, and mortality.

Chapter 3 has therefore not offered solutions. It has clarified the condition. It has shown that fear-driven governance is sustained by metaphysical forgetfulness. The exposure of that forgetfulness constitutes the necessary groundwork for any future conversation on leadership formation, courage, and institutional integrity.

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Chapter 4

Māyā: Illusion, Attachment, and the Ethical Blindness of Leadership

Introduction

Chapter 3 examined how fear in leadership arises from the denial of impermanence. By interpreting *Kaal* (death and temporality) through *Salok Mahalla 9*, it argued that many ethical distortions in higher education do not originate in managerial incompetence or moral ignorance, but in an unassimilated confrontation with finitude. When impermanence is resisted, fear intensifies; when mortality is forgotten, urgency dissolves; when time is treated as negotiable, ethical delay becomes normalized. Yet fear alone does not account for the full architecture of ethical distortion. *If Kaal exposes insecurity, Māyā sustains illusion.*

Where impermanence unsettles, illusion reassures. Where death strips away false stability, Māyā reconstructs it. Leadership does not merely tremble before loss; it attaches itself to substitutes for permanence—prestige, authority, metrics, influence, institutional continuity, and symbolic recognition. These attachments generate a subtler distortion than fear: they cloud perception itself.

This chapter turns, therefore, from existential insecurity to perceptual misrecognition. Drawing upon *Salok Mahalla 9* of the **Guru Granth Sahib**, composed by **Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib**, the present chapter examines Māyā as an ethical condition. In these saloks (4, 8, 10, 15, 19, 25, 28, 32, 35, 42, 49, and 51), Māyā is not presented as abstract cosmology nor as world-denial. It is described as attachment to transient forms mistaken for enduring realities. Wealth, relationships, youth, authority, beauty, recognition, and worldly success appear solid—but they dissolve. The illusion lies not in their existence, but in their absolutization.

Within contemporary Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), Māyā assumes institutional form. It appears as:

- Attachment to rankings and prestige
- Over-identification with administrative office
- Dependence on alliances and patronage
- Metric-driven conceptions of worth
- Performative displays of compliance
- Fear of reputational diminishment

Unlike overt corruption, these distortions often operate within the boundaries of institutional legitimacy. They are normalized as professionalism, strategic planning, or organizational prudence. Yet attachment subtly reorders moral priorities. Leaders begin to protect symbols rather than principles, visibility rather than truth, longevity rather than integrity.

If Chapter 3 diagnosed leadership fear as an existential disorder rooted in unassimilated impermanence, Chapter 4 diagnoses ethical blindness as a disorder of attachment rooted in illusion. Fear contracts courage; illusion distorts judgment. Fear reacts to loss; illusion clings to form. Together they form a dual architecture of leadership fragility.

The structure of this chapter mirrors that diagnostic movement.

1. First, it examines specific institutional distortions in HEIs that arise from attachment—prestige anxiety, metric fixation, relational dependency, authority identification, and performative success. These are presented not as isolated managerial tendencies, but as expressions of Māyā within organizational life.
2. Second, it turns to the selected saloks of *Salok Mahalla 9* and interprets them systematically as a pedagogy of discernment. The saloks unveil how attachment generates blindness, how illusion sustains ethical delay, and how inner anchoring alone restores clarity. The purpose is not prescriptive reform, but diagnostic illumination.

If impermanence awakens moral urgency, Māyā explains why urgency is resisted.: If death exposes fragility, illusion explains why fragility is denied. Ethical leadership formation, therefore, requires liberation from both fear of loss and attachment to illusion. This chapter attends to the latter—not to condemn institutional life, but to clarify the perceptual distortions that silently govern it. Only when illusion is recognized can discernment begin.

Part I

4.1 Institutional Māyā: Ethical and Leadership Distortions in Contemporary Higher Education

Chapter 3 diagnosed leadership fear as an existential disorder rooted in the denial of impermanence. Chapter 4 now turns to a quieter but equally pervasive distortion: illusion sustained through attachment. If fear destabilizes leadership under threat, Māyā stabilizes distortion under reassurance. It does not alarm; it persuades. It does not unsettle; it comforts. It offers the promise of permanence within transient forms.

Table 1 provides the conceptual entry point into this diagnosis. It identifies the ethical and leadership challenges presently visible in contemporary Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and organizes them not merely as administrative weaknesses, but as patterned expressions of attachment. Prestige anxiety, metric fixation, relational dependency, authority identification, performative compliance, and ethical delay are treated here not as isolated failures, but as structurally reinforced distortions of perception.

The significance of Table 1 lies in its shift of emphasis. Ethical breakdown in universities is often explained through policy gaps, regulatory insufficiency, or individual misconduct. While such factors are real, they do not fully account for the persistence of distortion within otherwise sophisticated institutions. Table 1 suggests a deeper layer: leadership becomes ethically vulnerable when identity, legitimacy, and security are anchored in transient institutional forms—recognition, visibility, alliances, authority, and measurable success.

Māyā, in this context, does not imply unreality of the world. It signifies misrecognition within the world. The illusion arises when provisional structures are treated as ultimate foundations. Institutional culture then normalizes attachment, and attachment gradually reshapes discernment. What appears prudent may conceal avoidance. What appears strategic may mask dependency. What appears successful may obscure compromise.

This Part therefore does not turn immediately to scriptural interpretation. It first attends carefully to the institutional field itself. Table 1 maps the terrain of illusion within contemporary HEIs. It names the distortions before explaining their roots. It exposes the pattern before interpreting its depth.

Only after the landscape of attachment is clarified can the teachings of *Salok Mahalla 9* be approached not as abstraction, but as diagnosis. Where Chapter 3 asked why leaders fear loss, this Part asks why leaders cling to illusion. Both questions concern ethical formation. But here the emphasis rests on perception—on how attachment stabilizes distortion long before crisis makes it visible.

The distortions identified in Table 1 do not emerge in isolation; they unfold in a patterned sequence of attachment. Prestige anxiety seeks recognition, metrics legitimize it, relationships protect it, authority consolidates it, performance displays it, and delay preserves it. What appears as diverse administrative challenges thus reveals a single underlying dynamic: the gradual absolutization of transient institutional forms. Māyā operates not through dramatic collapse, but through subtle normalization. Leadership becomes ethically vulnerable not at the moment of crisis, but at the point where attachment quietly reshapes discernment.

Problem Caption	**Description of the Problem (Empathetic & Contextualized)**	**Ethical Challenge in HEIs**	**Primary Ethical Distortion (Māyā)**	**Why This Distortion Fits (Māyā Perspective)**
Prestige-Driven Leadership Decisions	Academic leaders and faculty often operate within reputational economies where rank, citations, awards, and	Decisions favour image, ranking, and visibility over truth and fairness	**Illusion of Status (Ahankār sustained by Māyā)**	Māyā presents prestige as lasting and meaningful, inflating ego and blinding

Problem Caption	Description of the Problem (Empathetic & Contextualized)	Ethical Challenge in HEIs	Primary Ethical Distortion (Māyā)	Why This Distortion Fits (Māyā Perspective)
	institutional status shape judgment. Over time, prestige becomes a source of security and self-worth, subtly influencing ethical choices.			ethical discernment
Attachment to Institutional Position and Title	Roles such as Vice-Chancellor, Dean, or Professor become deeply entwined with personal identity. Fear of losing relevance or authority leads to defensive governance and resistance to critique.	Leadership becomes self-protective rather than mission-oriented	**Identity Fixation**	Māyā causes transient roles to be mistaken for the self
Relationship-Based Ethical Compromise	Collegial alliances, patronage networks, and informal loyalties provide emotional and professional security. Leaders hesitate to act ethically if it risks relational rupture.	Selective silence, favoritism, and diluted accountability	**Attachment (Moh)**	Māyā binds conscience to relational comfort and belonging
Metric Obsession and Performative Success	Rankings, impact factors, funding metrics, and dashboards dominate institutional priorities. Ethical	Instrumental governance displaces moral judgment	**Illusion of Measurement**	Māyā equates quantification with value and meaning

Problem Caption	Description of the Problem (Empathetic & Contextualized)	Ethical Challenge in HEIs	Primary Ethical Distortion (Māyā)	Why This Distortion Fits (Māyā Perspective)
	and educational meaning is reduced to numerical output.			
Ritualistic Ethics Compliance	Codes of conduct and ethics committees exist, but often function symbolically. Compliance replaces conscience.	Ethics becomes procedural rather than lived	**Formalism without Discernment**	Māyā sustains illusion through outward form without inner clarity
Anxiety Despite Material and Institutional Security	Even in well-resourced institutions, leaders experience restlessness, fear of decline, and constant comparison.	Governance driven by insecurity rather than sufficiency	**Insatiability**	Māyā generates endless desire and dissatisfaction
Ethical Delay Rationalized as Pragmatism	Ethical issues are postponed in the name of institutional stability, timing, or strategic caution.	Harm persists while action is deferred	**Attachment to Convenience**	Māyā promises safety through postponement, prolonging entanglement
Suppression of Dissent to Preserve Harmony	Leaders discourage critique to maintain collegiality, consensus, or institutional image.	Academic freedom is weakened	**Fear of Disapproval**	Māyā binds truth to social approval
Commodification of Education	Education is treated primarily as a market product, credential, or revenue stream.	Moral and formative purposes are marginalized	**Reduction of Meaning to Utility**	Māyā transforms vocation into transaction

Problem Caption	Description of the Problem (Empathetic & Contextualized)	Ethical Challenge in HEIs	Primary Ethical Distortion (Māyā)	Why This Distortion Fits (Māyā Perspective)
Ethical Blindness due to Seniority and Reputation	Long tenure and past achievements create moral complacency.	Accountability becomes selective	**Illusion of Moral Immunity**	Māyā sustains ego through accumulated recognition
Burnout from Endless Striving and Comparison	Faculty and administrators experience exhaustion from constant performance pressure.	Loss of ethical vitality and reflection	**Attachment to Achievement**	Māyā fuels endless striving without fulfilment
Fragmentation between Personal Values and Institutional Action	Individuals privately hold ethical values but publicly conform to institutional expectations.	Integrity is compartmentalized	**Inner Disintegration**	Māyā sustains a split between inner truth and outer action

Table 1: Ethical and Leadership Challenges in Contemporary Higher Education Institutions

Relevance of the table:

1. **Conceptual Precision**: Distortions arise not from fear of loss (Kaal) but from **false gain**.
2. **Gurmat Fidelity**: Māyā is treated as **ethical misrecognition**, not metaphysical illusion.
3. **Leadership Relevance**: Every problem maps directly onto **real HEI governance dynamics**.
4. **Pedagogical Value**: This table can directly support:
    - leadership training,
    - reflective exercises,
    - ethical diagnostics.

In the Figure 1, Māyā, as interpreted in Salok Mahalla 9, refers to ethical illusion sustained by attachment, ego, and false security. These distortions are institutionally reinforced rather than merely individual failings.

If Kaal awakens moral urgency by revealing the end of all forms, Māyā deceives by promising fulfilment within those forms; ethical clarity requires freedom from both.

Ethical leadership fails not only when leaders fear loss, but when they are captivated by gain.

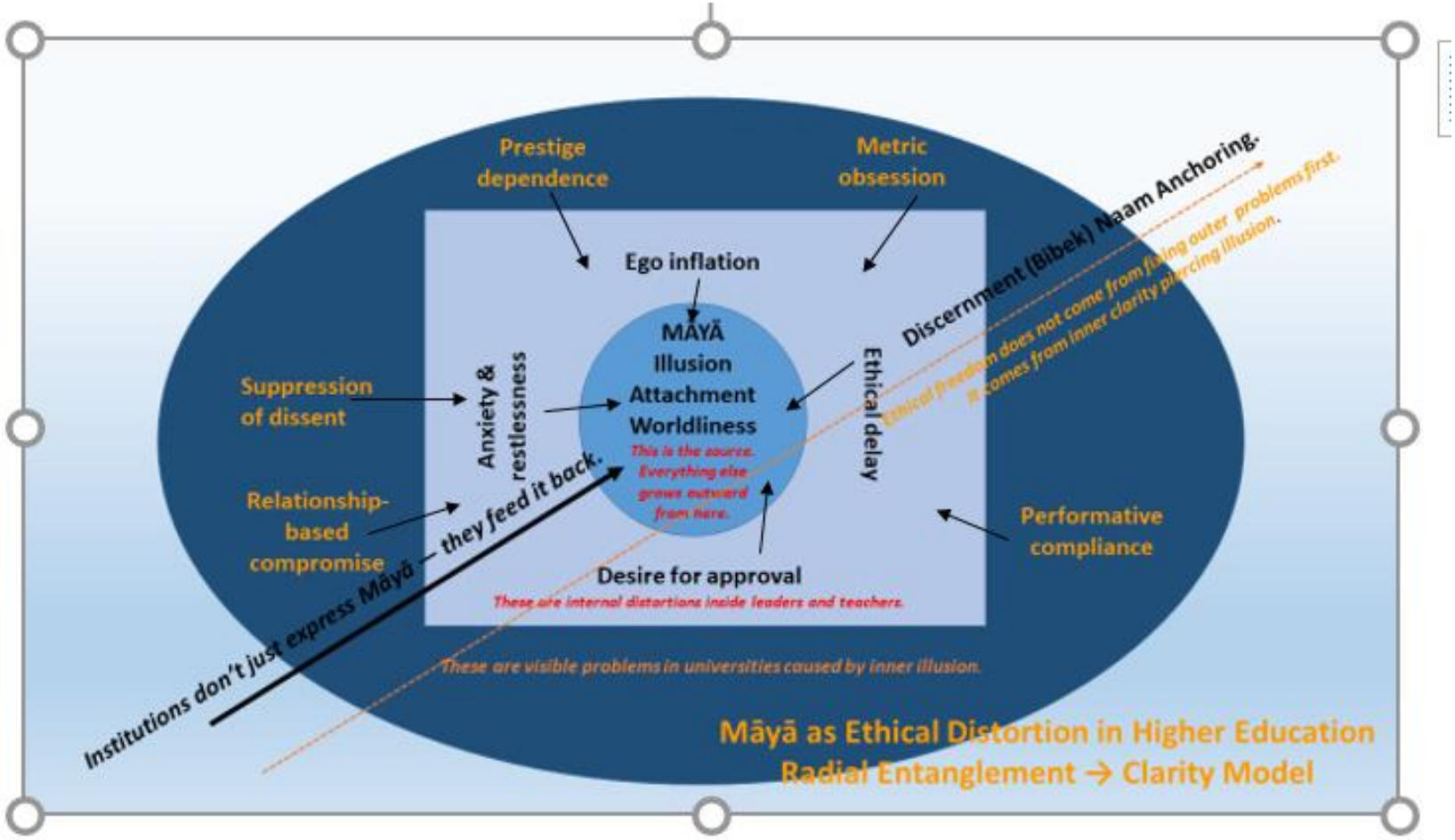

Figure 1. Mental Visualization Guide: Māyā as Ethical Distortion (Radial Model).

Māyā as Ethical Distortion in Higher Education **(**Radial Entanglement → Clarity Model**)**

Māyā entangles leaders through attraction; ethical leadership emerges when inner clarity interrupts illusion and restores integrity. **MĀYĀ** (A small circle labelled) sits at the center. This is the **source**. Everything else grows outward from here.; four things orbit it which are Ego inflation, Anxiety & restlessness, Desire for approval, Ethical delay; these are internal distortions inside leaders and teachers.; Five outer things Prestige dependence, Metric obsession, Relationship-based compromise, Performative compliance, Suppression of dissent; these form a wide institutional ring, which means these are visible problems in universities caused by inner illusion. This represents entanglement pulling inward as shown by black solid arrows representing entanglement pulling inward; one dashed diagonal arrow cuts through everything, symbolizing ethical liberation.

Figure 1 presents a radial model that visually depicts how Māyā operates within institutional leadership and how ethical formation unfolds through discernment. The structure moves from the center outward, indicating that ethical integrity in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) is not imposed externally but cultivated inwardly.

Core (Center Node): Discernment (Bibek): At the center stands *discernment* (bibek)—the capacity to see through illusion. This is not merely intellectual acuity but ethical clarity: the ability to distinguish substance from appearance, integrity from symbolic success, and moral coherence from institutional narrative. Discernment interrupts the spell of Māyā by exposing the provisional nature of prestige, metrics, authority, and public validation. Without this central faculty, the outer dimensions remain vulnerable to distortion. With it, illusion is neither denied nor feared—it is recognized.

Middle Ring: Ethical Capacities Formed by Māyā-Awareness: Radiating from the core are six interrelated ethical capacities. These do not arise automatically; they are cultivated through sustained awareness of attachment and its subtle operations within institutional life.

1. **Detachment from Role and Identity**: Leadership is exercised without ego-investment in title, rank, or administrative office. Authority is understood as stewardship rather than possession. When identity is not fused with position, criticism does not become existential threat.
2. **Freedom from Prestige and Recognition**: Leaders resist the reduction of institutional worth to rankings, awards, and performance metrics. Prestige is acknowledged as provisional, not ultimate. Ethical decision-making is not subordinated to reputational calculus.
3. **Ethical Independence from Relationships**: Institutional networks—boards, donors, senior faculty, political actors—remain necessary but do not determine moral judgment. Leaders retain the capacity to act without compromise even when alliances withdraw support.
4. **Humility and Ego-Awareness**: Continuous vigilance against intellectual arrogance and seniority-based entitlement protects discernment. Status does not shield one from ethical scrutiny. Awareness of ego becomes a safeguard against illusion.
5. **Inner Anchoring beyond Institutional Rewards**: Conscience is stabilized by an inward orientation that is not contingent on approval, visibility, or measurable success. Leadership endurance flows from inner clarity rather than external reinforcement.
6. **Resistance to Performative Compliance**: Visible adherence to policy does not substitute for substantive ethical engagement. Leaders prioritize integrity over display and substance over symbolic reassurance.

These capacities form the mediating layer between inner discernment and outer institutional practice. They represent the transformation of perception into character.

Outer Ring: Leadership Outcomes in HEIs: The outer ring depicts institutional outcomes that emerge from sustained interaction of the inner capacities. These outcomes are not mechanically produced; they arise organically when discernment shapes leadership culture. Among them are:

- Ethical consistency under pressure
- Protection of academic freedom
- Courageous dissent without hostility
- Fair and impartial governance
- A meaning-centered leadership culture

The figure thus illustrates that institutional integrity is not the starting point but the consequence of inward clarity.

Interaction Logic (What the Figure Conveys)

The radial model communicates a precise ethical logic:

- Māyā binds leaders to outer rewards—prestige, metrics, authority, belonging.
- Discernment disrupts this binding by revealing their transience.
- Ethical leadership emerges from the inside outward, not from regulatory enforcement inward.
- Institutional integrity is therefore a by-product of inner freedom rather than a managerial imposition.

In this way, Figure 1 mirrors the structural clarity of the earlier chapter while shifting the ethical axis. If Chapter 3 demonstrated how fear destabilizes leadership under the shadow of impermanence, this figure demonstrates how illusion stabilizes distortion through attachment. Both expose vulnerability. But here the emphasis rests on perception: when illusion is recognized, leadership is liberated from the quiet captivity of prestige, power, and performance.

4.2 Distortions Explained

1 The Institutional Field of Illusion

Table 1 presents the empirical landscape of this chapter. It identifies the ethical and leadership challenges currently visible in contemporary Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and organizes them not merely as administrative inefficiencies but as structured distortions of perception.

The table does not treat these challenges as isolated moral failures. It reveals them as patterned responses sustained by attachment—to prestige, metrics, relationships, authority, visibility, and institutional continuity. In this sense, Table 1 functions as a diagnostic instrument. It maps how Māyā operates within institutional culture before it is recognized as illusion. If Chapter 3 examined how fear destabilizes leadership under the shadow of impermanence, this chapter begins by examining how attachment stabilizes distortion within institutional life.

2. Prestige Anxiety and Symbolic Preservation

One of the most visible distortions identified in Table 1 is prestige anxiety. Universities operate within competitive hierarchies structured by rankings, awards, titles, and public reputation. Leadership decisions increasingly take place under the pressure of symbolic comparison.

The ethical distortion arises when institutional standing becomes a primary object of protection. Transparency may be delayed, dissent suppressed, and difficult truths softened in order to preserve image. Reputation gradually shifts from being an outcome of integrity to being a condition that dictates action.

This is not corruption in its crude form. It is attachment to recognition. Institutional self-worth becomes dependent upon external validation. Leadership, in such environments, begins to guard prestige as though it were permanence.

3 Metric Fixation and Quantified Worth

Table 1 further identifies the dominance of measurable outputs—citations, funding totals, enrollment growth, performance indicators—as central to contemporary governance. Metrics are indispensable tools for accountability and planning. Yet when they define intrinsic worth, they generate distortion.

Education becomes production. Scholarship becomes output. Faculty are evaluated primarily by numerical visibility. What cannot be measured risks marginalization.

The ethical concern here is subtle. When quantification becomes synonymous with value, discernment narrows. Leaders begin to prioritize what is countable over what is formative. Intellectual life is reframed through statistical legitimacy rather than moral and pedagogical depth.

Attachment to measurable success stabilizes this distortion.

4. Relational Dependency and Institutional Conformity

HEIs function within complex relational networks—governing boards, donors, political stakeholders, accrediting agencies, senior faculty alliances. Table 1 highlights how attachment to these networks can generate dependency.

Ethical compromise frequently emerges not from hostility but from the desire to preserve belonging. Leaders may hesitate to confront misconduct, avoid principled dissent, or postpone accountability when relationships are at stake.

Here the distortion lies in equating relational stability with ethical security. Institutional harmony is protected, sometimes at the cost of moral clarity. Belonging becomes a silent regulator of decision-making.

5. Authority Identification and Role Fixation

Administrative authority provides continuity and influence. Over time, however, role and self can become indistinguishable. Table 1 identifies this fusion as a critical distortion in leadership. When identity is anchored in office, criticism is experienced as existential threat. Governance becomes defensive. Accountability appears destabilizing. Authority, rather than being exercised as stewardship, becomes guarded as possession.

This attachment does not necessarily produce overt tyranny. It produces subtle rigidity. Ethical flexibility narrows because leadership is protecting not merely a decision, but a self-concept stabilized by title and position.

6. Performative Compliance and Ethical Appearance

Modern institutions often equate ethical responsibility with procedural conformity. Codes of conduct, audit mechanisms, reporting systems, and regulatory frameworks create visible structures of compliance.

Table 1 identifies a risk within this structure: performative ethics. Institutions may appear ethically robust while inward discernment weakens. Compliance becomes a substitute for conscience. The presence of procedure is mistaken for the presence of integrity.

The distortion here is reliance on visibility. Ethical life is treated as externally demonstrable rather than internally cultivated.

7. Ethical Procrastination and Strategic Delay

Another recurring challenge mapped in Table 1 is ethical delay under strategic justification. Leaders may defer difficult decisions to maintain stability, avoid controversy, or protect institutional continuity.

Delay is rationalized as prudence. Yet postponement often masks attachment—to reputation, to alliances, to image. Time becomes a tool for avoidance.

This distortion stabilizes compromise by promising future correction while sustaining present inaction.

The Pattern Revealed by Table 1

- When considered collectively, the challenges outlined in Table 1 reveal a consistent pattern:
    - Leadership distortion begins with attachment.
    - Attachment reshapes perception.
    - Reshaped perception normalizes compromise.
- These distortions are not anomalies; they are reinforced by institutional incentives. The culture of higher education rewards visibility, continuity, alignment, and expansion. Within such an environment, attachment appears rational.

- Māyā operates precisely here—not as metaphysical abstraction, but as institutional logic that elevates transient forms into stabilizing anchors of identity and security.

Where fear destabilizes under threat, attachment stabilizes under illusion.: Fear contracts courage.: Illusion contracts discernment. Together, they form the dual vulnerability of leadership.

Part I has not yet interpreted the saloks. It has identified the field within which illusion operates. Table 1 has exposed the manifestations of attachment in contemporary HEIs. The next part turns to *Salok Mahalla 9* of the **Guru Granth Sahib**, composed by **Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib**, to examine how these distortions are unveiled at their root. The table has named the symptoms.: The saloks will disclose the source.

Part II

Māyā as an Ethical Category: Relevance for Higher Education Leadership

Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib's engagement with Māyā in *Salok Mahalla 9* constitutes a sustained ethical inquiry into the nature of illusion, attachment, and worldly entanglement. Unlike metaphysical critiques that dismiss the world as unreal, these saloks examine how the world becomes ethically deceptive when transient forms are mistaken for enduring sources of meaning, security, and identity. Māyā, as articulated here, is not an abstract philosophical category but a lived condition that distorts judgment, inflates ego, and perpetuates moral bondage.

The saloks associated with Māyā—**4, 8, 10, 15, 19, 25, 28, 32, 35, 42, 49, and 51**—reveal a consistent ethical pattern: attachment generates restlessness; restlessness sustains ego; ego blinds discernment; and blindness results in repeated ethical failure. Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib does not moralize this condition; instead, he exposes it with clarity and restraint, allowing illusion to collapse under its own contradictions.

Ethical Challenge in HEIs (Part I)	**Relevant Salok(s) (Mahalla 9)**	**Core Teaching on Māyā (Illusion & Attachment)**	**Leadership Formation Outcome (Part II Insight)**
Prestige-driven decision making and reputational anxiety	4, 35, 42	Prestige and recognition are deceptive and inflate ego	Leaders cultivate humility and resist status-based judgment
Ethical compromise due to dependence on alliances and patronage	8, 19, 25	Attachment to relationships binds conscience	Ethical independence from factions and loyalties

Ethical Challenge in HEIs (Part I)	Relevant Salok(s) (Mahalla 9)	Core Teaching on Māyā (Illusion & Attachment)	Leadership Formation Outcome (Part II Insight)
Metric obsession and performative success culture	10, 28, 49	External achievements create illusion of meaning	Meaning-centered leadership over output fixation
Identity fixation with academic titles and positions	15, 32	Identification with form and role is delusion	Leadership as stewardship, not self-extension
Ritualistic compliance with ethics codes without inner conviction	19, 51	Ritual without discernment perpetuates illusion	Ethics grounded in conscience, not formalism
Anxiety-driven governance despite material security	4, 35	Māyā breeds restlessness and fear even amid abundance	Inner stability replaces anxious administration
Moral delay justified by institutional convenience	25, 28	Attachment prolongs entanglement and rebirth	Timely ethical action replaces postponement
Suppression of dissent to preserve harmony or image	8, 42	Desire for approval sustains illusion	Truth-speaking normalized despite discomfort
Commodification of education	10, 49	Treating education as transaction deepens illusion	Education reclaimed as moral and intellectual formation
Ethical blindness due to seniority or reputation	32, 35	Ego fortified by illusion resists correction	Continuous self-scrutiny regardless of rank
Burnout caused by endless striving and comparison	4, 28	Māyā generates insatiable desire and fatigue	Detachment restores balance and sustainability
Fragmentation between inner values and institutional action	51	Without inner anchoring, action becomes hollow	Integrated conscience-based leadership

Table 2. Ethical Challenges in Higher Education, Teachings on Māyā in Salok Mahalla 9, and Leadership Formation Outcomes

4.3 Māyā as Deception of Judgment, Not Denial of the World

Across these saloks, Māyā is presented as a **cognitive and ethical deception**, not a negation of worldly existence. Wealth, learning, ritual practice, pleasure, and social recognition are not condemned in themselves. What is dismantled is the assumption that these can provide permanence, fulfillment, or moral grounding.

Saloks such as **4, 10, and 35** illustrate how external success breeds inner anxiety rather than peace. Even abundance fails to satisfy because desire, once tethered to illusion, becomes insatiable. The ethical implication is crucial: leaders may possess resources, authority, and recognition, yet remain inwardly unstable. Decision-making under such conditions is inevitably distorted, as action arises from restlessness rather than clarity.

This analysis directly challenges modern institutional assumptions that stability, growth, or prestige naturally produce ethical governance. Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib suggests the opposite: without discernment, abundance intensifies illusion.

1. Attachment (Moh) and the Erosion of Ethical Independence

A recurring concern in the Māyā saloks is **attachment to relationships and social validation**. Saloks **8, 19, 25, and 42** highlight how dependence on approval, alliances, and emotional security binds the mind and weakens moral agency. The individual becomes hesitant, calculating, and silent in moments that demand clarity.

Ethically, attachment transforms conscience into negotiation. Decisions are filtered through questions of acceptance, belonging, and consequence rather than truth. This insight is particularly relevant to HEIs, where collegiality, networks, and institutional harmony are often prioritized. Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib does not reject relational life; he warns against **ethical dependence** upon it.

True ethical independence, as implied in these saloks, arises not from isolation but from inner detachment—the capacity to remain truthful without being governed by relational fear or reward.

2. Ego, Prestige, and the Illusion of Self-Extension

Saloks **15, 32, and 35** address the subtle reinforcement of ego through status, identity, and recognition. Here Māyā operates by equating external roles and achievements with the self. Intellectual accomplishment, ritual piety, or social standing become extensions of ego rather than instruments of service. Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib exposes this as a fragile construction. Prestige, once mistaken for worth, resists accountability and correction. Ethical blindness emerges not from ignorance but from self-assurance sustained by illusion. In academic contexts, this manifests as seniority-based immunity, reputational shielding, and resistance to critique. The saloks suggest that humility is not an attitude imposed from outside, but the natural consequence of recognizing the illusory basis of ego-inflation.

3. Ritual, Formalism, and Performative Ethics

Several Māyā saloks—particularly **19 and 51**—critique ritualized religiosity and outward correctness divorced from inner discernment. Compliance, when detached from ethical

awareness, becomes another form of illusion. One appears aligned while remaining inwardly unchanged.

This critique maps directly onto contemporary institutional ethics regimes, where codes, committees, and procedures often substitute for moral courage. Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib's concern is not with form itself, but with **form mistaken for substance**. Māyā thrives where appearance replaces authenticity.

Ethical leadership, therefore, cannot be secured through performative adherence alone; it requires inner clarity that precedes action.

4. Māyā, Restlessness, and Ethical Fatigue

Saloks **28, 35, and 49** describe the exhaustion produced by endless striving. Māyā generates perpetual comparison, ambition, and dissatisfaction. Even success fails to quiet the mind. Over time, this restlessness leads to burnout, disengagement, and ethical numbness.

The ethical significance of this insight is profound. Moral failure is often attributed to weakness or negligence; Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib points instead to **exhaustion produced by illusion**. Without detachment, leaders and teachers lose the capacity for sustained ethical attention.

Freedom from Māyā restores balance not by withdrawal, but by reordering desire—allowing action to arise from sufficiency rather than compulsion.

5. Liberation from Māyā through Discernment and Inner Anchoring

Importantly, the Māyā saloks do not conclude in negation. Saloks such as **49 and 51** gesture toward resolution through inner anchoring—implicitly through Naam. Liberation from illusion is not achieved by rejecting the world, but by seeing it clearly.

Discernment dissolves illusion. Attachment loosens. Action becomes lighter, freer, and ethically consistent. For leaders and teachers, this means the ability to engage fully with institutional life without being governed by it. The Māyā saloks of *Salok Mahalla 9* function as an ethical mirror, revealing how attachment, ego, and illusion quietly govern judgment. They explain why ethical compromise persists even in secure, privileged, and well-regulated institutions. By exposing illusion rather than condemning action, Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib offers an ethical pedagogy uniquely suited to leadership formation.

Summary

Māyā as Ethical Blindness in Leadership: Chapter 4 examined Māyā as an ethical category that illuminates the perceptual roots of leadership distortion in contemporary Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). While ethical failures are often attributed to policy insufficiency, regulatory gaps, or individual weakness, this chapter argued that many distortions arise from a subtler

source: attachment to transient institutional forms mistaken for enduring foundations of identity and security.

Part I mapped the institutional field of illusion. Through systematic analysis of leadership challenges—prestige anxiety, metric fixation, relational dependency, authority identification, performative compliance, ethical delay, commodification, and fragmentation—the chapter demonstrated that ethical compromise frequently emerges not from overt corruption but from normalized attachment. These distortions are institutionally reinforced and culturally legitimized, making them difficult to recognize as illusion.

Part II turned to selected saloks (4, 8, 10, 15, 19, 25, 28, 32, 35, 42, 49, 51) from *Salok Mahalla 9* of the *Guru Granth Sahib*, composed by Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib. The saloks were interpreted not as metaphysical abstraction but as ethical pedagogy. Māyā was revealed as misrecognition—the absolutization of wealth, recognition, relationships, authority, and accumulation. The illusion lies not in the existence of these realities, but in treating them as ultimate.

The chapter demonstrated that attachment reshapes perception before it produces misconduct. When prestige becomes identity, integrity weakens. When metrics define worth, discernment narrows. When relationships determine action, independence declines. When compliance replaces conscience, ethical substance thins. Māyā stabilizes distortion by reassuring leaders that visible success equals moral security.

Ethical leadership formation, therefore, requires perceptual clarity. Institutional reform alone cannot address illusion; discernment must precede structure. Freedom from Māyā does not demand withdrawal from institutional life but engagement without absolutization. Leadership matures when transient forms are exercised responsibly yet held lightly.

If Chapter 3 exposed how insecurity destabilizes leadership, Chapter 4 has shown how attachment stabilizes distortion. Ethical blindness arises not only from fear, but from fascination. The work of discernment begins when illusion is recognized.

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Part II: Ethical Freedom in Leadership – Kaal and Māyā in Parallel

Concluding remarks

Part II moves from diagnosis to formation, exploring how the teachings of Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib on **Kaal (impermanence)** and **Māyā (illusion and attachment)** illuminate the ethical challenges of leadership in higher education. While Part I established the philosophical foundations of ethical discernment, this section translates those insights into actionable leadership frameworks. Kaal and Māyā represent complementary forces shaping human behavior: Kaal awakens urgency by revealing the inevitability of all endings, while Māyā entices with promises of permanence within temporal forms. Ethical leaders must navigate both: complacency arises when fear lacks urgency, and entanglement arises when attachment clouds discernment. Together, these teachings prepare leaders not merely to act ethically, but to remain ethically free.

1. Kaal as Moral Awakener

Kaal, by contrast, is the reminder of impermanence. It awakens ethical urgency by revealing that all forms—status, achievement, relationships, and even life itself—are transient. Its confrontation with mortality dissolves illusions sustained by attachment, forcing leaders to recognize what truly matters. In higher education, the lessons of Kaal translate to:

- Ethical urgency over procrastination and delay.
- Equal accountability beyond status or rank.
- Prioritization of meaningful action over performative metrics.
- Awareness that all institutional roles are temporary, emphasizing stewardship over possession.

Where Māyā entangles, Kaal liberates—but the shock of Kaal alone is insufficient for sustained ethical practice.

2. Māyā as Ethical Distortion

Māyā, in Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib's Saloks, is the subtle force that binds judgment through attachment. It manifests in institutional life as attachment to security, prestige, relationships, status, and performative success. Unlike the abrupt confrontation with Kaal, Māyā operates through seduction, encouraging leaders to mistake permanence for reality. Its effects in higher education are evident in:

- Fear-driven decision-making sustained by attachment to continuity.
- Prestige- and reputation-driven governance inflating ego and blinding ethical judgment.
- Over-identification with positions or titles, fostering ownership rather than stewardship.

- Ethical compromise arising from relational entanglements or factional allegiances.
- Suppression of dissent to maintain harmony, reinforcing illusion over moral truth.

Liberation from Māyā is achieved through **discernment and inner anchoring**, enabling leaders to act with humility, accountability, and conscience-driven clarity.

3. Parallel Logic of Kaal and Māyā

The complementary dynamics of Kaal and Māyā are captured in the Table 1

Kaal (Earlier Paper)	**Māyā (This Paper)**
Death dismantles illusion by ending all forms	Māyā sustains illusion by promising permanence
Shock-based awakening	Seduction-based entanglement
Equality through mortality	Differentiation through status
Ethical urgency	Ethical delay
Fear dissolved	Attachment dissolved

Table 1: Parallel Logic of Kaal and Māyā

Together, Kaal and Māyā provide a holistic lens for ethical leadership: Kaal compels action, Māyā challenges discernment. Freedom from both ensures that ethical choices are neither reactive out of fear nor constrained by attachment. The following table demonstrates that institutional distortions are not merely managerial failures but manifestations of existential misperception.

Ethical Challenge in Higher Education	**Relevant Salok(s) (Mahalla 9)**	**Teaching on Māyā (Illusion & Attachment)**	**Teaching on Impermanence (Kaal)**	**Leadership Implication for HEIs**
Fear-driven decision making	7, 13, 30, 46, 52	Attachment to security and continuity sustains anxiety	Death is inevitable and impartial	Leaders act without fear, grounded in ethical clarity rather than self-preservation
Prestige- and reputation-driven governance	1, 4, 24, 35, 42	Prestige inflates ego and deceives judgment	Death dissolves status and rank	Humility and accountability replace status-based authority

Ethical Challenge in Higher Education	**Relevant Salok(s) (Mahalla 9)**	**Teaching on Māyā (Illusion & Attachment)**	**Teaching on Impermanence (Kaal)**	**Leadership Implication for HEIs**
Over-identification with position or title	5, 15, 21, 32, 37	Identity fixation is a form of illusion	Body and roles are temporary	Leadership practiced as stewardship, not ownership
Ethical compromise due to relationships and patronage	2, 8, 18, 19, 25, 44	Attachment to approval binds conscience	Relations do not accompany one at death	Ethical independence from factions and alliances
Suppression of dissent and whistle-blowing	17, 30, 42, 52	Desire for harmony sustains illusion	Impermanence demands moral urgency	Truth-speaking normalized despite discomfort
Ritualistic ethics compliance	19, 51	Formalism without discernment perpetuates Māyā	Death exposes empty ritual	Ethics grounded in conscience, not procedure
Metric obsession and performative success	10, 28, 35, 49	Quantification creates illusion of meaning	Achievement ends with death	Meaning-centered leadership over metric fixation
Ethical delay and postponement	17, 25, 30	Attachment prolongs entanglement	Time is uncertain and irreversible	Timely ethical action prioritized
Unequal application of rules	7, 13, 46, 52	Power creates illusion of exemption	Death equalizes all	Ethical equity and uniform accountability
Burnout and moral fatigue	4, 28, 35, 49, 52	Endless striving arises from Māyā	Mortality reframes priorities	Sustainable leadership rooted in detachment
Ethical blindness due to seniority	24, 30, 32, 35	Ego fortified by illusion resists correction	Sudden death shatters pride	Continuous self-scrutiny regardless of rank
Fragmentation between personal values and institutional roles	9, 39, 51	Without inner anchoring, action becomes hollow	Life without preparation is wasted	Integrated conscience-based leadership

Ethical Challenge in Higher Education	Relevant Salok(s) (Mahalla 9)	Teaching on Māyā (Illusion & Attachment)	Teaching on Impermanence (Kaal)	Leadership Implication for HEIs
Loss of academic freedom	7, 13, 42, 46	Fear of approval sustains illusion	Power dissolves before Kaal	Fearless scholarship and inquiry
Instrumentalization of education	10, 39, 49	Reduction of vocation to utility is Māyā	Human life is rare and purposeful	Education reclaimed as ethical formation

Table 2. Mapping Ethical Challenges in Higher Education to Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib's Teachings on Māyā and Impermanence and Their Leadership Implications

This table integrates Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib's teachings on Māyā (illusion and attachment) and Kaal (impermanence and death) to demonstrate their complementary role in diagnosing ethical distortions and shaping leadership formation in higher education institutions.

4. Leadership Implications in Higher Education

The integration of Kaal and Māyā yields a practical framework for ethical formation in higher education institutions, as summarized in Table 2. The table maps common ethical challenges—ranging from metric obsession and ritualistic compliance to fear-driven decision-making and loss of academic freedom—to the corresponding teachings of Salok Mahalla 9 on Māyā and impermanence.

Leadership implications emphasize:

- Acting without fear, grounded in moral clarity rather than self-preservation.
- Practicing humility and accountability in place of status-driven authority.
- Stewardship-oriented leadership, avoiding over-identification with roles or achievements.
- Ethical independence from factional pressures and relational bias.
- Meaning-centered decision-making over metric fixation.

By addressing both the entangling influence of Māyā and the awakening force of Kaal, higher education leaders cultivate a **freedom-infused ethical practice**—one that integrates conscience, discernment, and urgency into institutional life.

Summary Reflection: If Kaal awakens moral urgency by revealing the end of all forms, Māyā deceives by promising fulfillment within those forms. Ethical leadership requires liberation from both: fear without urgency breeds complacency, and attachment without discernment breeds entanglement. Together, the teachings of Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib on Kaal and Māyā

guide leaders to act with courage, clarity, and detachment, enabling them not merely to do what is right, but to remain ethically free in the complex terrains of higher education.

If Kaal exposes the fragility of all forms and Māyā entangles the self within those forms, their distortions are not overcome merely by intellectual awareness but by interior reorientation. The teachings of Guru Tegh Bahadur do not leave the seeker suspended between fear and detachment; they point toward a positive center that replaces both distortion and anxiety. That center is Bibek (discerning wisdom), Vairāg (detached clarity), and ultimately Naam—the anchoring of consciousness in the Eternal.

Kaal, when rightly understood, does not culminate in dread but in Bibek: the awakened discernment that recognizes the transient without clinging to it. Māyā, when penetrated, gives way to Vairāg: not withdrawal from responsibility, but freedom from possessiveness and egoic investment. Yet discernment and detachment are not self-generated virtues; they arise from Naam—the inward remembrance and alignment with the Eternal that grounds conscience, stabilizes judgment, and liberates action from compulsion.

Thus, ethical freedom in leadership is not merely the absence of fear or attachment. It is the presence of inner anchoring. Naam nurtures spiritual sovereignty; Bibek refines ethical perception; Vairāg sustains integrity amid power, prestige, and institutional pressure. Together, they transform the shock of Kaal into moral seriousness and the seduction of Māyā into lucid stewardship. In this way, Part II does not conclude with diagnosis alone but with formation: the cultivation of leaders whose authority flows not from status or survival, but from awakened conscience rooted in the Eternal.

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Part III

Foundations of Ethical Formation: Discernment, Detachment, and Ontological Anchoring

Part III of this study focuses on **ethical formation**, examining how leadership becomes capable of moral judgment, ethical courage, and sustained integrity. While earlier sections of the study explored the existential and diagnostic dimensions of leadership—through the themes of *Kaal* (impermanence) and *Māyā* (illusion)—the present part addresses the constructive question: **how is ethical leadership formed?** The analysis proposes that ethical formation within the pedagogical vision of *Salok Mahalla 9* unfolds through two interrelated stages: the cultivation of **discernment and detachment (Bibek–Vairāg)** and the stabilization of ethical agency through **ontological anchoring in Naam**.

Together, Chapters 5 and 6 articulate a Gurmat-based model of leadership formation in which moral awareness develops through interior transformation rather than through procedural regulation alone. The framework suggests that ethical leadership cannot be reduced to compliance with rules or adherence to institutional codes. Instead, it emerges through the formation of **moral perception, ego transcendence, and existential grounding**, enabling leaders to act with clarity, courage, and humility within complex institutional environments.

Bibek–Vairāg: Discernment and Detachment as Ethical Capacity

Chapter 5 examines *Bibek* and *Vairāg* as mutually reinforcing dimensions of ethical capacity formation. *Bibek* refers to the cultivation of **moral discernment**, the ability to perceive the difference between illusion and truth, appearance and reality, or short-term advantage and enduring ethical responsibility. *Vairāg*, in turn, represents **detachment from ego-driven attachment**, allowing the leader to act upon ethical insight without being constrained by personal ambition, institutional prestige, or social validation.

Within the ethical pedagogy of *Salok Mahalla 9*, discernment and detachment operate together as formative disciplines that reshape the moral consciousness of the leader. This process unfolds through three interrelated capacities. First, *Bibek–Vairāg* fosters **moral vigilance**, cultivating attentiveness to the subtle ways in which ego, fear, and attachment distort ethical perception. Leaders formed through discernment become capable of recognizing illusion within both personal motivations and institutional structures. Second, the practice of detachment produces **ego relativization**, weakening the tendency to equate authority with personal identity or institutional success. Leadership authority is therefore understood not as a source of personal prestige but as a responsibility exercised within a broader moral horizon. Third, these capacities together contribute to **ethical capacity formation**, enabling leaders to make principled decisions even under conditions of institutional pressure or uncertainty.

Through this framework, Chapter 5 demonstrates that ethical leadership requires more than the ability to identify moral principles; it requires the interior freedom to act upon them. Discernment reveals distortion, while detachment frees the leader from the attachments that sustain it. Yet the chapter also suggested that discernment alone remains vulnerable unless anchored in a deeper source of stability. Ethical clarity may identify the right course of action, but without existential grounding the leader may still falter in moments of crisis, fear, or isolation.

Naam: Ontological Anchoring and Moral Freedom

Chapter 6 addresses this limitation by examining *Naam* as the **ontological foundation that stabilizes ethical agency**. Whereas *Bibek–Vairāg* cultivates ethical capacity, *Naam* provides the interior anchoring that sustains ethical action over time. In the theological vision of *Salok Mahalla 9*, Naam represents the remembrance and interior orientation toward Divine reality, through which the self becomes aligned with a truth that transcends ego, institutional recognition, and worldly achievement.

This anchoring produces a distinctive form of moral freedom. Leaders whose identity is grounded in Divine remembrance no longer depend upon external validation or institutional success for their sense of worth. Instead, ethical action becomes the natural expression of a consciousness stabilized in enduring reality. Chapter 6 identified three key dimensions of this transformation.

First, Naam cultivates **interior steadiness**, freeing leaders from the oscillations of fear, anxiety, and reputational insecurity that often shape institutional decision-making. This steadiness enables leaders to respond to crises with calm rather than panic and to pursue long-term ethical commitments rather than short-term strategic advantage. Second, Naam generates **non-performative integrity**, where ethical conduct arises not from the desire to appear virtuous but from genuine alignment with moral truth. Leadership in this mode becomes authentic rather than performative, guided by conviction rather than reputation. Third, the interior anchoring produced through Naam contributes to **institutional legitimacy**, as communities increasingly trust leaders whose authority derives from character and moral credibility rather than positional power.

Thus, Naam transforms ethical competence into **ethical freedom**. If *Bibek–Vairāg* trains leaders to see clearly and act independently of attachment, Naam stabilizes the self so that such clarity can be sustained without fear or insecurity.

Integrative Ethical Formation

Taken together, Chapters 5 and 6 present ethical formations as a **progressive process of interior transformation**. Discernment reveals illusion, detachment loosens the hold of ego-driven attachment, and ontological anchoring stabilizes the self within a deeper moral horizon. The result is leadership capable of acting with both ethical clarity and existential freedom.

Within the broader argument of this study, this framework completes the pedagogical progression introduced earlier. The awareness of impermanence (*Kaal*) exposes the fragility of worldly security. The critique of illusion (*Māyā*) reveals the distortions generated by attachment to prestige and validation. The disciplines of *Bibek–Vairāg* cultivate ethical perception and detachment from ego-centered motivations. Finally, *Naam* anchors the self in Divine reality, transforming ethical capacity into enduring moral freedom.

In this way, ethical leadership emerges not primarily through external control or institutional regulation but through **interior formation grounded in discernment, detachment, and remembrance**. Leaders shaped by this process exercise authority with humility, respond to crisis with steadiness, and cultivate institutional cultures characterized by trust, responsibility, and moral coherence. Ethical formation therefore becomes not an ancillary aspect of leadership development but the very foundation upon which sustainable and legitimate governance rests.

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Chapter 5

Bibek and Vairāg: Ethical Capacity Formation in Higher Education Leadership

From Ethical Awareness to Ethical Agency

5.1 Introduction: Detachment and Ethical Discernment (Bibek/Vairāg) as Leadership Capacity (Chapter Orientation: From Diagnosis to Formation)

The preceding chapters (Chapter 3 and Chapter 4) demonstrated that leadership in higher education becomes ethically fragile under the pressures of impermanence (Kaal) and ethically distorted under the influence of illusion and attachment (Māyā). Yet awareness of fragility does not produce integrity, and exposure of illusion does not guarantee right action.

This chapter therefore turns to **Bibek (ethical discernment)** and **Vairāg (detachment)** as the formative ethical core of *Salok Mahalla 9*. If Kaal humbles leadership and Māyā clarifies distortion, Bibek and Vairāg cultivate the inner capacities required to act rightly within these conditions.

This chapter argues that ethical leadership failure in contemporary Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) is fundamentally a formation deficit, not a regulatory deficit. Policies may exist; ethical language may be present; codes may be formalized. What is often missing is the cultivated ability to act without ego, fear, attachment, or prestige dependency.

The Saloks associated with Bibek/Vairāg (12, 16, 23, 26, 27, 31, 36, 40, 41, 45, 48, 53, 56) therefore function as a disciplined pedagogy of leadership formation rather than devotional exhortation.

Within Salok Mahalla 9, the theme of **Detachment and Ethical Discernment (Bibek/Vairāg)** occupies a distinct and indispensable pedagogical position. Following the diagnostic exposure of impermanence (Kaal) and illusion (Māyā), Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib turns toward the cultivation of inner ethical capacity—training the mind to act rightly under pressure rather than merely to recognize ethical truth. This transition is articulated through a specific set of Saloks that emphasize restraint, discernment, humility, and freedom from egoic and relational captivity.

Based on the traditional count and thematic consolidation, the Saloks most directly associated with **Bibek/Vairāg** are: **Saloks: 12, 16, 23, 26, 27, 31, 36, 40, 41, 45, 48, 53, 56**

These Saloks consistently emphasize:

- Non-attachment to ego, desire, and outcome
- Ethical clarity beyond pleasure–pain duality
- Self-restraint and inner vigilance
- Equality, humility, and freedom from pride
- Calmness and steadiness amid uncertainty

Unlike the Saloks on impermanence (Kaal) or Māyā, which primarily *reveal* reality, the Bibek/Vairāg Saloks actively *train* consciousness. They address not ignorance, but **ethical weakness**—the inability to act rightly despite knowing what is right.

The relevance of these Saloks to higher education leadership is direct and urgent. Many ethical failures in universities do not arise from lack of ethical codes or awareness, but from the absence of **detached judgment** when leaders face competing pressures. The Bibek/Vairāg Saloks address precisely these failure points.

In HEIs, these Saloks speak to leadership challenges such as:

- **Ethical compromise under relational pressure**: (alliances, patronage networks, collegial loyalty)
- **Over-identification with role, title, or authority**: (Vice-Chancellor, Dean, Head, senior faculty status)
- **Fear-driven silence and avoidance of dissent**
- **Prestige-induced arrogance and resistance to accountability**
- **Performative compliance in place of moral courage**
- **Decision paralysis due to anxiety over consequences**

The Saloks associated with Bibek/Vairāg directly counter these tendencies by cultivating **ethical independence**—the capacity to act without being governed by approval, fear, or outcome. Detachment here does not signify withdrawal from responsibility, but freedom from captivity to institutional identity and social reassurance.

From a Gurmat perspective, Bibek (discernment) enables leaders to distinguish:

- truth from convenience,
- duty from advantage,
- responsibility from self-preservation.

Vairāg (detachment) ensures that this discernment is **actionable**, not merely contemplative. Together, they stabilize ethical judgment, allowing leadership to function consistently rather than episodically. Thus, the Bibek/Vairāg Saloks function as the **ethical capacity-building core** of Salok Mahalla 9. If impermanence awakens urgency and Māyā dissolves illusion,

detachment equips leaders with the inner freedom required to act ethically without guarantee of reward or protection.

This Chapter therefore argues that **detachment is not an ascetic ideal but a leadership necessity**. In the absence of Bibek/Vairāg, ethical awareness collapses under pressure; with it, leadership integrity becomes sustainable. The Saloks under this theme provide a disciplined pedagogy for cultivating such leadership—one capable of resisting fear, prestige, and relational dependency while remaining firmly engaged in institutional responsibility.

Salok No.	**Core Teaching (Bibek / Vairāg)**	**Typical Ethical Failure in HEIs**	**Leadership Capacity Cultivated**
12	Duality breeds suffering	Conflicted decision-making under political pressure	Moral coherence
16	Acceptance of Divine Will	Resistance to accountability, blame-shifting	Ethical humility
23	Wisdom through detachment	Over-identification with office or designation	Role detachment
26	Compassion defines virtue	Instrumental treatment of faculty/students	Human-centered leadership
27	Knowledge without virtue is hollow	Technocratic governance without ethics	Moral intelligence
31	Renunciation calms the mind	Crisis-driven, reactive leadership	Emotional regulation
36	Wise perceive equality	Favoritism, nepotism, patronage networks	Impartial judgment
40	Desire fuels rebirth	Endless ambition cycles, expansionism	Restraint and limits
41	Ego silencing	Authoritarian decision-making	Listening leadership
45	Detachment is freedom	Fear of loss of power or prestige	Courageous independence
48	Self-control is strength	Impulsive or retaliatory governance	Ethical self-discipline
53	Ego as root of sin	Personalization of institutional critique	Reflexive leadership
56	Detached living is ideal	Burnout culture and performative busyness	Sustainable leadership

Table 1. Mapping Saloks on Detachment and Discernment (Bibek/Vairāg) to Ethical Failures in Higher Education Leadership

Analytical Note: These Saloks collectively address *how leaders fail ethically even when rules exist*, by targeting the inner dispositions that govern ethical judgment under pressure.

5.2 Textual–Ethical Analysis of Bibek / Vairāg Saloks

1 Detachment and Ethical Discernment (Bibek/Vairāg) as Leadership Formation

Unlike the diagnostic emphasis of impermanence (Kaal) and illusion (Māyā), the Saloks associated with **Bibek (discernment)** and **Vairāg (detachment)** function as a formative ethical pedagogy. These verses do not merely expose existential conditions; they **train the moral capacities required for ethical action within those conditions**.

In Salok Mahalla 9, Bibek is not presented as abstract wisdom but as a **practical orientation of the self**, cultivated through detachment from ego, desire, status, and relational dependency. Saloks such as 23, 36, and 41 emphasize that ethical clarity arises when the leader no longer derives identity from role, recognition, or power. This detachment enables the leader to judge situations on ethical merit rather than on personal or political consequence.

Vairāg complements Bibek by disciplining desire. Saloks 31, 40, and 45 highlight that uncontrolled desire—whether for expansion, prestige, or dominance—undermines ethical stability. In higher education contexts, this manifests as metric obsession, competitive escalation, and governance driven by visibility rather than values. Through renunciation of excess and cultivation of restraint, these Saloks train leaders to act without compulsive ambition.

Crucially, the Bibek Saloks address **ethical action under uncertainty**. Salok 16 reframes accountability not as control but as acceptance of responsibility without egoic defence. Saloks 26 and 27 foreground compassion and virtue as the true tests of wisdom, challenging the technocratic bias prevalent in institutional leadership.

Taken together, the Bibek/Vairāg Saloks constitute an **ethical capacity-building framework**. They explain how leaders can remain principled when policies fail, relationships pressure, and outcomes are uncertain—thereby transforming leadership from performative compliance to morally grounded action.

2 Ethical and Leadership Challenges in Contemporary Higher Education Institutions

Contemporary higher education institutions operate within environments marked by regulatory complexity, competitive pressures, performance metrics, and expanding stakeholder expectations. While these conditions have led to increased formalization of governance structures, they have simultaneously intensified ethical strain on institutional leadership.

Ethical failures in HEIs today rarely arise from the absence of policy; rather, they emerge from **the inability of leaders to exercise discernment, restraint, and moral independence under pressure**.

One of the most pervasive challenges is **role-bound decision-making**, wherein leaders become excessively identified with designation, authority, or institutional image. This often results in defensive governance, reluctance to acknowledge error, and suppression of dissenting academic voices. Closely related is the problem of **relational dependency**, where decisions are shaped by loyalty networks, patronage, or political alignment rather than by ethical principle or institutional good.

A second category of challenges involves **technocratic reductionism**. Administrative efficiency, rankings, and quantifiable outputs are increasingly treated as substitutes for ethical judgment. While such metrics serve functional purposes, their dominance fosters performative compliance—where procedures are followed without moral engagement—and erodes the deeper educational mission of universities. In such contexts, leaders may comply with rules while simultaneously violating ethical trust.

A third challenge concerns **emotional and psychological instability in leadership**. Crisis-driven environments, fear of reputational loss, and continuous evaluation produce reactive decision-making marked by anxiety, impulsivity, or authoritarian control. These conditions weaken ethical consistency and undermine trust across institutional hierarchies.
Finally, contemporary HEIs face a crisis of **ethical courage**. Leaders often recognize ethical obligations but delay or avoid action due to fear of backlash, loss of position, or uncertainty of outcomes. This phenomenon—ethical delay—does not signify moral ignorance but a lack of cultivated inner capacity to act independently of consequence.

Taken together, these challenges indicate that ethical breakdown in higher education is not primarily a structural or regulatory problem. It is fundamentally a **formation problem**—a deficit in discernment, detachment, and self-governance at the level of leadership.

3 Relevance of the Mapping Table: Why Text–Institution Correlation Matters

The table mapping **Saloks on Bibek/Vairāg to ethical failures in HEIs** serves a critical analytical function in this study. It demonstrates that Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib's Salok Mahalla 9 does not merely offer spiritual counsel but provides a **systematic ethical pedagogy** capable of addressing contemporary leadership failures.

Rather than treating Saloks as abstract moral aphorisms, the table operationalizes them by linking each teaching to a specific ethical dysfunction observable within higher education governance. This approach accomplishes three methodological objectives:

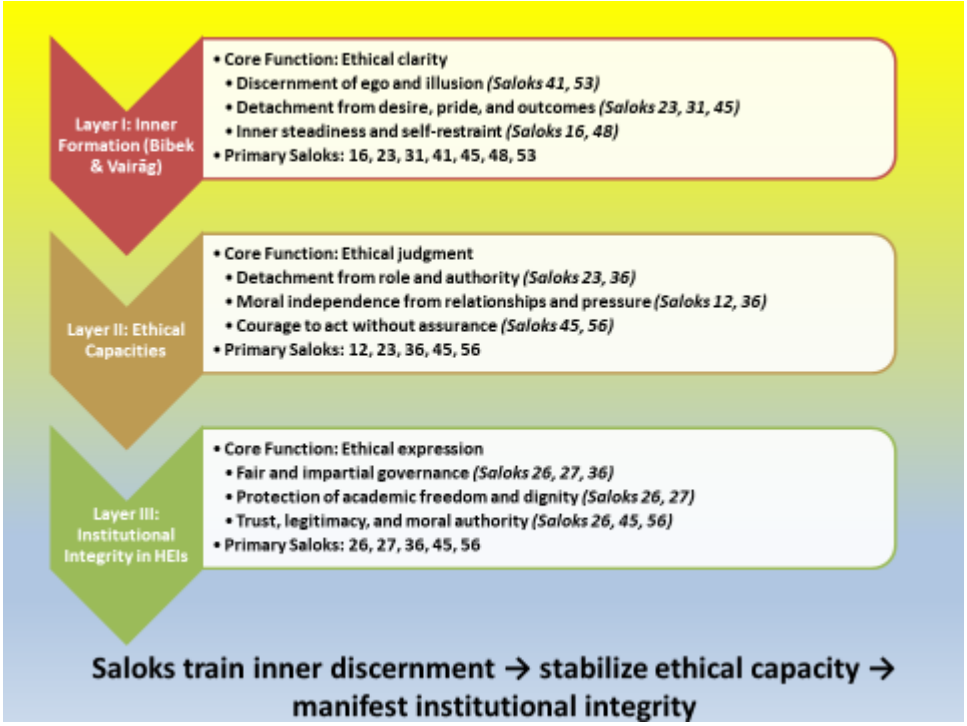
- First, it **translates existential wisdom into applied ethical capacity**. By correlating inner dispositions (ego, desire, attachment) with institutional outcomes (favoritism, authoritarianism, performativity), the table shows how ethical failures originate internally before manifesting structurally.

- Second, it **avoids moral generalization**. Ethical challenges are not presented as universal or vague; they are identified with precision and contextualized within real leadership practices in HEIs. This strengthens scholarly credibility and avoids devotional abstraction.

- Third, the table **justifies Bibek/Vairāg as an independent analytical theme** within the four-paper framework. While impermanence (Kaal) and illusion (Māyā) diagnose existential conditions, the Bibek Saloks uniquely address *how leaders become ethically capable of responding* to those conditions.

The table thus marks the transition from diagnosis to formation. In this sense, the table is not supplementary but foundational. It anchors the textual–ethical analysis that follows and establishes the practical relevance of Gurmat wisdom for contemporary leadership formation in higher education.

Ethical leadership in higher education fails not because leaders lack rules, but because they lack the inner formation required to act rightly when rules are insufficient.



Inner formation → Ethical capacity → Institutional integrity

Figure 1. Bibek / Vairāg as Ethical Capacity Formation in Higher Education Leadership

This figure conceptualizes detachment and discernment as formative ethical capacities that enable leaders to act with clarity, restraint, and courage under institutional pressure. Ethical leadership emerges not through regulation or performance but through disciplined inner formation, resulting in stable and trustworthy governance structures.

Layer I: Inner Formation (Bibek & Vairāg): The foundational layer of ethical leadership formation is **inner discernment (Bibek)** and **detachment (Vairāg)**. Bibek refers to the cultivated capacity to distinguish truth from illusion, principle from convenience, and conscience from ego-driven impulse. In the context of leadership, this involves the **discernment of ego**—the recognition of how pride, ambition, prestige, and self-interest subtly distort judgment. Vairāg complements this discernment by enabling **freedom from attachment**, particularly to power, recognition, outcomes, and institutional permanence. Such detachment does not imply withdrawal from responsibility; rather, it stabilizes leadership action by loosening compulsive dependence on success or approval. Together, Bibek and Vairāg generate **inner steadiness**, an ethical composure that remains intact under pressure, uncertainty, and opposition. This inner formation precedes all ethical conduct, as leadership that lacks inward clarity inevitably reproduces institutional distortion.

Layer II: Ethical Capacities: From inner formation emerge specific **ethical capacities** that define capable leadership in higher education. **Detachment from role** enables leaders and teachers to exercise authority as stewardship rather than possession, preventing over-identification with titles, offices, or institutional status. This detachment fosters **moral independence**, allowing leaders to make principled decisions without being captured by factional loyalties, patronage networks, or reputational anxiety. Crucially, Bibek-formed leadership develops the **courage to act without assurance**—the willingness to uphold ethical commitments even when outcomes are uncertain, rewards are absent, or opposition is likely. These capacities do not arise from policy manuals or compliance training; they are cultivated through sustained inner discipline and ethical reflection. As such, they represent the transition from personal discernment to relational and organizational responsibility.

Layer III: Institutional Integrity in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs): When ethical capacities are consistently exercised, they manifest as **institutional integrity** within higher education systems. **Ethical governance** becomes possible when decisions are guided by principle rather than expediency, and when rules are applied impartially across rank and influence. **Academic freedom** is protected not merely through formal declarations but through leaders who are inwardly free from fear, enabling them to tolerate dissent, protect critical inquiry, and resist ideological or political coercion. Over time, such leadership generates **trust and legitimacy**, as faculty, students, and stakeholders recognize the consistency between declared values and lived practice. Importantly, institutional integrity is not imposed through surveillance or enforcement; it **emerges organically** when leadership is formed through Bibek and Vairāg. The health of the institution thus reflects the ethical formation of those entrusted with its authority.

Ethical Challenge in HEIs (Part I)	**Relevant Salok(s) (Mahalla 9)**	**Core Teaching on Bibek / Vairāg**	**Leadership Formation Outcome (Part II Insight)**
Ego-driven leadership and personalization of authority	41, 53	Ego must be silenced for wisdom to arise	Reflexive, self-governed leadership
Over-identification with office, rank, or title	23, 36	Detachment from status enables discernment	Stewardship-based leadership
Favouritism, patronage, and relational bias	12, 36	Duality distorts judgment; wisdom sees equality	Impartial and fair governance
Ambition-driven expansion and metric obsession	31, 40	Desire perpetuates restlessness and bondage	Ethically restrained leadership
Fear of loss, retaliation, or institutional backlash	45, 56	Detachment frees from fear and dependency	Moral courage and independence
Reactive decision-making during crises	31, 48	Renunciation calms the mind; self-control stabilizes action	Composed and principled leadership
Technocratic governance devoid of virtue	27	Knowledge without virtue is hollow	Values-anchored decision-making
Instrumental treatment of faculty and students	26	Compassion defines ethical excellence	Human-centered leadership culture
Suppression of dissent and academic critique	41	Ego-silencing enables ethical listening	Protection of academic freedom
Leadership burnout and performative busyness	56	Detached living sustains inner equilibrium	Sustainable leadership practice

Table 2. Ethical Challenges in Higher Education, Teachings on Bibek & Vairāg in Salok Mahalla 9, and Leadership Formation Outcomes

The Bibek/Vairāg Saloks therefore function not as moral exhortations but as a disciplined pedagogy of leadership formation capable of addressing ethical failure at its source. This table systematically correlates **ethical challenges observed in contemporary higher education institutions** with **specific Saloks from Salok Mahalla 9** that articulate the principles of **Bibek (ethical discernment)** and **Vairāg (detachment)**. It demonstrates how inner dispositions addressed in the Saloks—such as ego-silencing, restraint of desire, and freedom from attachment—function as **ethical mechanisms** rather than abstract ideals. By linking each challenge to a corresponding leadership formation outcome, the table bridges **Part I (ethical diagnosis of institutional failure)** and **Part II (ethical capacity-building)**, showing that sustainable leadership integrity in higher education emerges through disciplined inner formation rather than procedural enforcement.

Problem Caption	**Description of the Problem**	**Ethical Challenge in HEIs**	**Primary Ethical Distortion**	**Why This Distortion Fits Bibek / Vairāg**
Ego-Centric Authority	Leadership decisions are personalized and defended as extensions of self	Suppression of critique; defensive governance	Ego inflation	Bibek dissolves egoic identification; Vairāg detaches authority from self
Role Captivity	Identity becomes inseparable from position or title	Abuse of power; resistance to accountability	Role-attachment	Vairāg enables detachment from designation; Bibek restores perspective
Relational Governance	Decisions shaped by loyalty networks and patronage	Favouritism; inequitable outcomes	Relational dependency	Bibek discerns ethical merit beyond relationships
Ambition-Driven Expansion	Growth pursued without ethical limits	Metric obsession; mission drift	Desire-compulsion	Vairāg restrains desire; Bibek clarifies sufficiency
Fear-Based Compliance	Ethical action avoided due to fear of loss	Ethical delay; moral silence	Outcome attachment	Vairāg frees action from consequence fixation
Reactive Crisis Leadership	Decisions driven by anxiety rather than judgment	Volatile governance; inconsistency	Emotional instability	Bibek stabilizes discernment under pressure
Technocratic Moral Substitution	Rules replace ethical judgment	Procedural compliance without integrity	Moral outsourcing	Bibek restores inner ethical agency
Instrumental Human Relations	People treated as means to institutional ends	Dehumanization of academic community	Compassion erosion	Bibek reconnects ethics with dignity
Authoritarian Listening	Dissent interpreted as threat	Silencing of academic freedom	Ego-defensiveness	Vairāg loosens need for control
Performative Busyness	Constant activity masks lack of ethical direction	Burnout culture; symbolic leadership	Activity attachment	Vairāg reorients leadership toward ethical purpose

Table 3: Ethical and Leadership Challenges in Contemporary Higher Education Institutions

This table clarifies that **Bibek/Vairāg addresses ethical distortions of agency**, not merely existential misunderstanding (Kaal) or perceptual illusion (Māyā). The problems listed arise **after leaders already know impermanence and illusion**, yet fail to act ethically due to attachment, fear, or ego. By naming these distortions precisely, the table demonstrates why Bibek/Vairāg is the **ethical hinge** of the four-paper framework.

Where impermanence diagnoses vulnerability and Māyā exposes distortion, Bibek and Vairāg restore ethical agency by freeing leadership from captivity to ego, desire, and consequence.

Bibek and Vairāg re-align leadership consciousness by restoring discernment at the center and stabilizing ethical action through detachment. Institutional integrity emerges as a natural consequence of this inward ethical formation.

This diagram presents **Bibek (ethical discernment)** and **Vairāg (detachment)** as the central mechanisms through which ethical leadership capacity is formed and expressed institutionally. The visual structure emphasizes a movement from **inner ethical clarity to outward institutional impact**, mediated by disciplined self-reflection and detachment.

At the core of the diagram lies **Bibek**, representing ethical discernment as clear moral perception—the capacity to distinguish truth from convenience and principle from expediency. Bibek is shown as emerging at the center of leadership consciousness, underscoring the Gurmat insight that ethical clarity cannot be externally imposed but must arise internally through disciplined awareness.

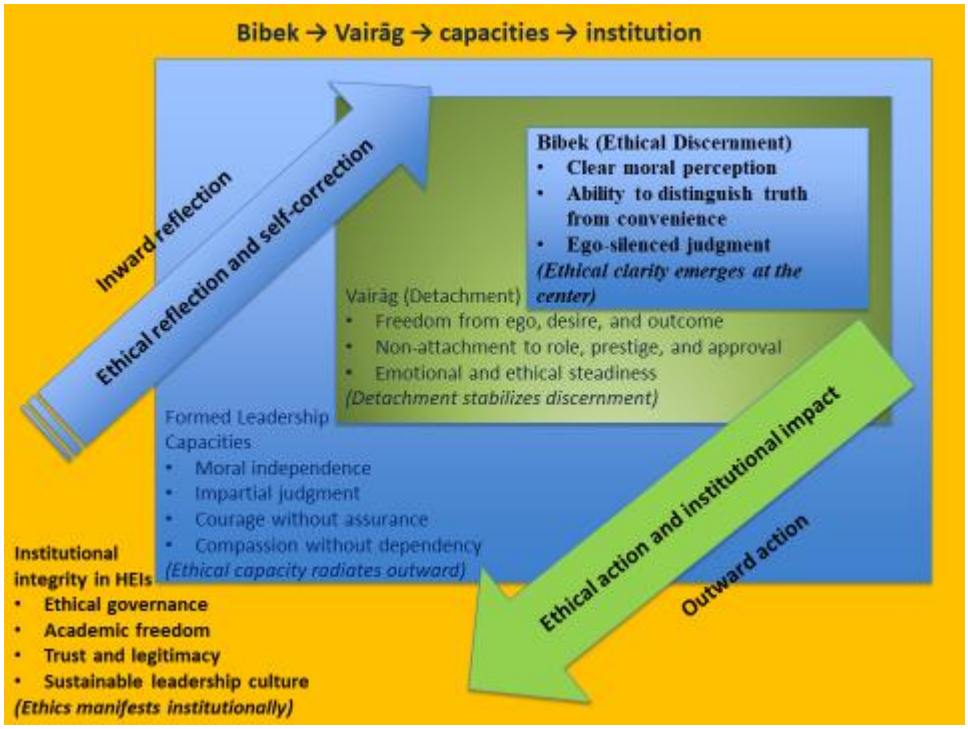


Figure 2. Mental visualization of Bibek and Vairāg as ethical re-centring in leadership formation.

Surrounding and stabilizing this core is **Vairāg (detachment)**, depicted as freedom from ego, desire, and outcome-dependence. Detachment from role, prestige, and approval enables emotional and ethical steadiness, ensuring that discernment remains stable under pressure. The diagram thus visually conveys that detachment does not weaken leadership authority but secures it by preventing ethical judgment from being distorted by fear or ambition.

From this stabilized center radiate **formed leadership capacities**, including moral independence, impartial judgment, courage without assurance, and compassion without dependency. These capacities mark the transition from inner formation to ethical agency, indicating how Bibek and Vairāg translate into consistent leadership behaviour rather than episodic moral action.

The outward arrows labelled **ethical reflection and self-correction** and **ethical action and institutional impact** indicate a dynamic, non-linear process. Leadership ethics is shown not as a static state but as an ongoing movement of reflection, correction, and action. This bidirectional flow reinforces the idea that ethical leadership requires continual inward recalibration even as it manifests outwardly.

Finally, the diagram culminates in **institutional integrity in higher education institutions**, represented through ethical governance, academic freedom, trust, and sustainable leadership culture. The placement of institutional integrity at the outer level visually reinforces the study's central claim: ethical institutions are not produced by regulation alone, but are the natural expression of leadership formed through inner ethical discipline.

5.3 Bibek/Vairāg as Ethical Capacity Formation

The preceding analyses of **Kaal (impermanence)** and **Māyā (illusion and attachment)** establish the existential and psychological conditions under which leadership in higher education becomes fragile and distorted. Together, they demonstrate that institutional failure is not accidental but emerges predictably when leadership operates without existential clarity and ethical perception. Yet diagnosis alone does not generate ethical action. Awareness of impermanence may humble leadership, and recognition of illusion may expose distortion, but neither by itself equips leaders with the capacity to act ethically under pressure.

This third part therefore turns to **Bibek (ethical discernment)** and **Vairāg (detachment)** as the formative ethical category in Salok Mahalla 9. Bibek and Vairāg address a critical question left unresolved by the earlier analyses: *how does leadership become capable of sustained ethical action within conditions of impermanence and illusion?* In the Gurmat framework, ethical failure is not primarily the result of ignorance or absence of regulation, but of insufficient inner formation—specifically, the inability to discern truth from convenience and to act without attachment to ego, role, or outcome.

Bibek is presented in Salok Mahalla 9 not as abstract wisdom but as disciplined moral perception. It enables leadership to recognize ethical truth even when it conflicts with

institutional advantage or personal security. Vairāg complements this discernment by stabilizing ethical judgment through detachment. By freeing leadership from excessive dependence on status, recognition, and consequence, Vairāg transforms ethical insight into ethical resilience. Together, they form the ethical capacities necessary for leadership to remain principled amid complexity, pressure, and uncertainty.

In the context of higher education institutions—where leadership decisions are frequently entangled with political influence, reputational risk, and relational obligation—Bibek and Vairāg emerge as indispensable. Formal codes of conduct and governance frameworks presuppose leaders who are already capable of ethical independence; Salok Mahalla 9 recognizes that such capacity must be cultivated. Bibek/Vairāg thus functions as the **ethical bridge** between diagnosis (Kaal and Māyā) and liberation (Naam), transforming existential awareness into actionable moral agency.

1 Discernment Beyond Duality: Bibek as Ethical Perception

Relevant Saloks: 12, 36, 41. In Salok Mahalla 9, Bibek is introduced as an ethical capacity that arises when perception is freed from duality, ego, and relational bias. Saloks addressing this theme emphasize that ethical confusion persists not due to lack of knowledge but due to the fragmentation of judgment caused by self-interest and attachment. Wisdom, in this view, does not operate through oppositional thinking—friend versus foe, success versus failure—but through clarity that transcends ego-based binaries.

These Saloks portray duality as a fundamental obstacle to ethical discernment. When leadership perception is divided by preference, loyalty, or fear, ethical judgment becomes inconsistent and selectively applied. Bibek functions here as the discipline of seeing without distortion, allowing the leader to perceive situations as they are rather than as they serve personal or institutional advantage.

In higher education institutions, this form of discernment is critical. Leadership decisions frequently involve competing interests—administrative efficiency versus academic autonomy, institutional reputation versus ethical transparency. Without Bibek, leaders may rationalize ethical compromise as pragmatism. With Bibek, leaders retain clarity amid complexity, enabling impartial governance, ethical listening, and protection of dissent. Thus, Bibek restores ethical perception as the foundation of principled leadership.

2 Detachment from Role, Status, and Identity: Vairāg as Ethical Stability

Relevant Saloks: 23, 45, 56. The Saloks grouped under this theme emphasize that ethical stability arises through detachment from role, status, and external validation. Vairāg is not presented as renunciation of responsibility but as freedom from identity captivity—the condition in which leadership authority becomes inseparable from personal self-worth. Such captivity renders leaders ethically fragile, as threats to role or reputation trigger defensive and coercive behaviour.

These Saloks articulate detachment as the source of inner freedom. When leadership identity is no longer anchored in designation or recognition, ethical action becomes independent of personal consequence. Vairāg thus stabilizes ethical judgment by preventing fear of loss from dictating decisions.

Within higher education leadership, over-identification with office often results in authoritarian tendencies, resistance to accountability, and ethical delay. Vairāg directly counters these tendencies by enabling leaders to act as stewards rather than possessors of authority. Leadership formed through detachment exhibits courage without aggression, authority without domination, and resilience without rigidity. Ethical stability, in this sense, is not enforced through structure but sustained through inner freedom.

3 Discipline of Desire and Emotional Regulation: Ethical Steadiness in Action

Relevant Saloks: 31, 40, 48. This subgroup addresses the ethical consequences of unchecked desire and emotional impulsivity. The Saloks emphasize that desire perpetuates restlessness and ethical instability, while renunciation and self-control calm the mind and restore clarity. Ethical failure, in this framing, is frequently the result of emotional reactivity rather than moral ignorance.

In leadership contexts, desire manifests as ambition, expansionism, reputational anxiety, and compulsive performance. These tendencies produce reactive governance, short-term decision-making, and ethical inconsistency. The Saloks propose restraint not as suppression but as regulation—aligning action with ethical discernment rather than impulse.

For higher education leaders, emotional regulation is essential during crises, institutional transitions, and public scrutiny. The discipline of desire enables leaders to respond rather than react, to deliberate rather than defend. Ethical steadiness thus emerges as a trained capacity, allowing leadership to remain composed under pressure and oriented toward long-term institutional integrity rather than immediate gratification.

4 Virtue, Compassion, and Moral Substance: Beyond Technocratic Leadership

Relevant Saloks: 26, 27, 53. The final subgroup emphasizes that ethical leadership is grounded in moral substance rather than technical competence alone. The Saloks assert that knowledge without virtue is hollow, and that ego remains the root cause of ethical collapse. Compassion is presented not as sentiment but as a defining marker of ethical excellence.

In contemporary higher education, leadership increasingly operates within technocratic frameworks—metrics, policies, compliance systems. While necessary, these mechanisms cannot substitute for moral substance. Leaders may adhere to procedure while violating trust, dignity, or academic freedom. The Saloks challenge this substitution by re-centring leadership ethics in virtue and compassion.

When leadership is guided by moral substance, institutions cultivate trust, legitimacy, and human dignity. Compassionate leadership recognizes faculty and students not as instruments of institutional success but as moral agents within a shared ethical community. This ethical grounding completes the formation process initiated by Bibek and stabilized by Vairāg, ensuring that leadership capability is exercised in service of truth rather than power.

Together, these four subgroups demonstrate that Bibek and Vairāg constitute a **comprehensive ethical capacity-building framework**. They move leadership from ethical awareness to ethical action by forming discernment, stabilizing judgment, regulating desire, and grounding authority in virtue. In doing so, they address the central ethical deficit of contemporary higher education leadership: not ignorance of ethics, but inability to act ethically under pressure.

Ethical Challenge in HEIs	**Relevant Salok(s) (Mahalla 9)**	**Core Teaching on Bibek / Vairāg**	**Leadership Implications**
Ego-centred authority	41, 53	Ego clouds discernment; ethical clarity requires silencing self	Leaders exercise authority without defensiveness or domination
Role-based identity fixation	23, 45, 56	Detachment from role enables ethical freedom	Leadership functions as stewardship rather than possession
Fear-driven decision-making	31, 48	Self-control and restraint stabilize judgment	Leaders act ethically despite uncertainty or risk
Favouritism and relational bias	12, 36	Discernment transcends duality and personal allegiance	Fair, impartial governance
Ethical delay and inaction	31, 40	Desire and attachment inhibit timely ethical action	Decisive leadership grounded in principle
Metric-driven governance	27	Knowledge without virtue lacks ethical substance	Values-driven decision-making beyond performance indicators
Suppression of dissent	36, 41	Wisdom recognizes equality and listens without ego	Protection of academic freedom

Ethical Challenge in HEIs	Relevant Salok(s) (Mahalla 9)	Core Teaching on Bibek / Vairāg	Leadership Implications
Emotional reactivity in crises	48, 31	Inner discipline produces steadiness	Calm, ethical crisis leadership
Instrumentalization of people	26	Compassion defines ethical excellence	Human-centred leadership culture
Technocratic compliance	27, 53	Ethical integrity cannot be outsourced to systems	Leaders assume moral responsibility
Prestige-seeking institutional culture	23, 45	Detachment frees leadership from validation-seeking	Long-term institutional credibility
Burnout and overextension	31, 56	Renunciation of excess restores balance	Sustainable leadership practices

Table 4. Mapping Ethical Challenges in Higher Education to Bibek/Vairāg Teachings and Leadership Implications

This table demonstrates how Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib's teachings on Bibek and Vairāg offer a coherent ethical framework for addressing contemporary challenges in higher education leadership. Rather than prescribing administrative solutions, the Saloks cultivate inner ethical capacities—discernment, detachment, restraint, and compassion—that directly shape leadership behaviour. The mapping shows that institutional ethical failures often arise not from policy deficits but from unformed ethical agency, which Bibek and Vairāg seek to restore.

The figure demonstrates how diverse ethical challenges in higher education converge through discernment (Bibek) and detachment (Vairāg) into stable leadership capacities. Ethical governance emerges not through regulation alone but through disciplined inner formation.

This figure conceptualizes ethical leadership as an inward–outward process in which discernment (Bibek) and detachment (Vairāg) form the ethical capacities necessary for principled action. Ethical governance, academic freedom, and institutional trust emerge organically from leadership grounded in inner clarity rather than external control.

Integrity is not imposed; it emerges.

- Institutions that reward integrity reinforce inner ethical clarity
- Ethical cultures sustain ethical leaders
- "Institutions reflect the moral quality of leadership; they cannot compensate for its absence."
- *Integrity is not imposed; it emerges through ethical formation.*
- Integrity is not imposed; it emerges through ethical formation.

Summary

Bibek–Vairāg as Ethical Formation

Chapter 5 advances the central claim that ethical leadership in higher education is not sustained by regulatory frameworks alone but by cultivated interior discipline. Moving beyond the existential diagnosis of Kaal and the psychological exposure of Māyā in earlier chapters, this chapter identifies **Bibek–Vairāg** as the formative core of ethical capacity.

Throughout this chapter, Bibek (discernment) and Vairāg (detachment) have been treated not as discrete virtues but as convergent expressions of a single ethical disposition. Bibek–Vairāg signifies disciplined moral perception inseparable from ego-relativization. Discernment without detachment collapses into partiality; detachment without discernment risks indifference. Their unity constitutes ethical vigilance anchored in freedom from egoic attachment.

Drawing upon *Salok Mahalla 9*, this chapter has demonstrated that Bibek–Vairāg functions as an integrated discipline of:

- Moral vigilance
- Ego relativization
- Ethical capacity formation

Moral Vigilance: The chapter established that ethical leadership requires sustained interior alertness. Bibek–Vairāg cultivates a mode of perception capable of identifying distortion before it crystallizes into action. Ethical failure in institutional leadership is frequently preceded by diminished vigilance — by subtle accommodations to ego, loyalty, fear, or ambition.

As illustrated in **Table 1**, moral vigilance interrupts the progression from internal bias to institutional distortion. The framework demonstrates how disciplined discernment acts preventively rather than reactively.

Figure 1 further models this vigilance as a dynamic process of interior examination, ethical clarification, and principled response.

Ego Relativization: A central argument of the chapter has been that attachment to designation, prestige, recognition, or control produces ethical fragility. Bibek–Vairāg relativizes the ego without negating responsibility. Leadership identity is repositioned from possession to stewardship.

Through detachment, criticism ceases to be existential threat, and accountability ceases to be humiliation. Ethical steadiness emerges when identity is no longer fused with institutional authority.

This structural shift is diagrammatically presented in **Figure 2**, which contrasts ego-centric leadership with detachment-anchored leadership. The comparative implications for governance culture are summarized in **Table 2**, demonstrating how ego-relativization stabilizes institutional trust.

Ethical Capacity Formation: The chapter culminates in the argument that Bibek–Vairāg is not merely a moral orientation but a formative discipline that generates durable ethical capacity.

As synthesized in **Table.3**, the convergence of discernment and detachment produces:

- Clarity of judgment
- Emotional steadiness
- Non-reactive decision-making
- Principled institutional action

Figure 3 presents this convergence schematically, depicting Bibek–Vairāg as the hinge between existential awareness (Kaal), distortion exposure (Māyā), and spiritual anchoring (Naam).

Thus, ethical formation is articulated as a structured progression:

1. Recognition of impermanence (Kaal)
2. Exposure of illusion (Māyā)
3. Formation of ethical interiority (Bibek–Vairāg)
4. Anchoring in spiritual sovereignty (Naam)

Within this arc, Bibek–Vairāg functions as the decisive bridge. Without it, awareness remains theoretical. With it, ethical agency becomes stable.

Theoretical Contribution: This chapter contributes to leadership studies by reframing detachment not as withdrawal but as ethical strengthening. In dialogue with the pedagogy of *Guru Tegh Bahadur*, Bibek–Vairāg emerges as an interior discipline capable of countering:

- Performative governance
- Ego-driven defensiveness
- Metric obsession
- Reactive institutional decision-making

Rather than proposing new procedural reforms, the chapter argues for formative reorientation. Ethical integrity is not imposed; it is cultivated.

Concluding Synthesis: Bibek–Vairāg forms perception and stabilizes identity. It replaces moral reactivity with interior sovereignty. It transforms leadership from positional authority to principled stewardship.

If Kaal humbles leadership and Māyā clarifies distortion, Bibek–Vairāg equips leadership with the disciplined interior strength necessary to act rightly within institutional complexity.

Chapter 5 therefore establishes ethical formation as the indispensable hinge of the study. It prepares the ground for the final movement toward Naam, where ethical capacity finds its deepest anchoring.

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Chapter 6

Naam: Ontological Anchoring and Moral Freedom

This chapter explores **Naam** as the second major dimension of ethical formation in this study. While the previous chapter examined *Bibek–Vairāg* as the cultivation of discernment and detachment within the moral consciousness of the leader, the present chapter turns to **Naam as the ontological ground that stabilizes ethical agency itself**. The chapter argues that authentic moral freedom does not arise merely from cognitive discernment or ethical awareness; rather, it emerges from an interior anchoring in the Divine that reorients the self beyond ego-centered motivations. Naam, therefore, functions not simply as a devotional practice but as a formative principle that sustains interior steadiness, enables non-performative integrity, and ultimately grounds institutional legitimacy.

In many modern leadership frameworks, ethical behaviour is often treated as a product of external regulation, professional norms, or institutional accountability mechanisms. While such structures are necessary, they frequently fail to address the deeper existential instability of the leader. When leadership identity is constructed primarily through performance, reputation, or positional authority, ethical commitments remain fragile and susceptible to institutional pressures, personal ambition, or fear of loss. Within this context, the Sikh concept of **Naam** offers an alternative paradigm of ethical formation—one that situates moral freedom within an ontological relationship with the Divine rather than within external compliance or performative virtue.

Naam, understood as the remembrance and interior orientation toward the Divine Reality, reconstitutes the self at a foundational level. It forms what may be described as **ontological anchoring**, a condition in which ethical action flows from a stable spiritual center rather than from fluctuating psychological or institutional motivations. In such a framework, ethical conduct becomes less about outward moral display and more about the natural expression of a consciousness aligned with truth. The leader who is anchored in Naam acts not primarily to maintain authority, legitimacy, or social approval but because ethical action becomes integral to their transformed interior orientation.

This chapter develops the concept of Naam as an ethical formation process through two interrelated analytical movements.

The **first part** offers a thematic–ethical and hermeneutic analysis of fourteen Naam-related *saloks* (3, 6, 11, 14, 19, 33, 34, 38, 43, 47, 50, 54, 55, 57). Through close textual engagement,

the analysis demonstrates that remembrance of the Divine functions not merely as devotional instruction but as **the ontological ground of ethical steadiness**. These *saloks* collectively articulate how Naam dissolves existential fear, relativizes ego-centered identity, and cultivates an inner freedom that enables authentic ethical action. Rather than presenting moral rules or prescriptive ethical codes, the verses illuminate a transformation of consciousness in which ethical clarity emerges from the stabilization of the self in the Divine.

The analysis shows that Naam performs several ethically formative functions. First, it establishes **interior steadiness**, freeing the individual from the oscillations of pride, anxiety, and social validation that often destabilize ethical judgment. Second, it nurtures **non-performative integrity**, where moral conduct is no longer a strategic display of virtue but the spontaneous expression of a consciousness grounded in truth. Third, it generates **moral fearlessness**, enabling the individual to act ethically even within environments shaped by power asymmetries, institutional pressure, or reputational risk. Through this hermeneutic reading, the selected *saloks* reveal Naam as a transformative process that integrates spiritual awareness with ethical agency.

The **second part** of the chapter extends this theological and ethical insight into the contemporary context of leadership formation in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Modern universities frequently face crises of legitimacy that are often interpreted as structural or managerial problems. However, this chapter argues that such instability frequently reflects a deeper issue: leadership that has been formed primarily through technical competence and professional advancement rather than through existential anchoring. When leaders lack an interior grounding beyond institutional role and performance metrics, their decision-making can become reactive, self-protective, or overly responsive to external pressures.

Drawing on the ethical insights derived from the analysis of Naam, this section proposes a **Naam-informed leadership formation framework** for higher education. The framework suggests that sustainable institutional integrity requires leaders whose moral agency is rooted in interior steadiness rather than merely in regulatory compliance. Such leadership formation emphasizes self-transcendence, humility, and spiritual attentiveness as foundational capacities that shape ethical decision-making in complex institutional environments.

Within this framework, Naam becomes not a sectarian religious practice but a **principle of existential anchoring** that can inform broader conversations on ethical leadership. Leaders formed through such anchoring demonstrate a distinctive orientation toward authority and responsibility. Their legitimacy arises less from positional power and more from the credibility of their character, the consistency of their ethical commitments, and the depth of their interior stability. As a result, institutional trust becomes an outcome of ethical authenticity rather than merely of administrative effectiveness.

Taken together, the two parts of this chapter move from **scriptural hermeneutics to institutional application**. The hermeneutic analysis establishes the theological and ethical foundations of Naam as a transformative practice of remembrance, while the leadership

framework demonstrates how these insights can inform contemporary discussions of ethical formation in higher education leadership. By placing Naam at the center of this discussion, the chapter contributes to the broader argument of this study: that enduring ethical leadership requires not only moral discernment and detachment (as explored through Bibek–Vairāg in Chapter 5) but also **ontological grounding in the Divine**, through which authentic moral freedom becomes possible.

Thus, Naam emerges as a critical dimension of ethical formation—one that stabilizes the inner life of the leader, liberates ethical action from performative motivations, and strengthens the moral credibility of institutions shaped by such leadership.

Part 1

Naam in the 57 Saloks: Textual–Thematic Analysis

This section undertakes a thematic–ethical analysis of the Naam-oriented saloks within *Salok Mahalla 9*, identifying how they function not merely as devotional affirmations but as a coherent pedagogical architecture. The selected saloks—3, 6, 11, 14, 19, 33, 34, 38, 43, 47, 50, 54, 55, and 57—form the textual backbone of the Naam theme.

While Naam pervades the entire composition implicitly, these saloks articulate it explicitly as existential refuge, moral reorientation, ontological alignment, and spiritual liberation. In continuity with the methodological approach of the previous papers (Kaal, Māyā, Bibek/Vairāg), the present analysis organizes these saloks into four interrelated subgroups. The progression reveals a pedagogical ascent: from existential anchoring to ethical correction, from ontological awareness to culminating liberation.

6.1 Naam as Existential Anchor: Freedom from Fear of Kaal (Saloks 3, 6, 33, 47)

The first subgroup presents Naam as the antidote to existential anxiety. Earlier in the Kaal paper, impermanence was shown to unsettle human security and expose the fragility of worldly assurances. The saloks in this cluster respond directly to that anxiety.

- **Salok 3** emphasizes remembrance amidst impermanence, directing attention away from transient relationships toward the Divine Name as the enduring refuge.
- **Salok 6** warns against wasting life in forgetfulness, presenting remembrance as existential urgency rather than ritual piety.
- **Salok 33** underscores the inevitability of death and the futility of worldly accumulation, thereby situating Naam as the only meaningful preparation.
- **Salok 47** affirms that remembrance stabilizes the mind even as the body remains subject to decay.

Collectively, these saloks establish Naam as existential anchoring. The fear of Kaal does not disappear through denial but dissolves through alignment. The individual who internalizes Naam is not insulated from mortality but liberated from its psychological tyranny. In leadership terms, this produces fearlessness without recklessness. A leader anchored in Naam does not govern defensively, for their legitimacy does not depend upon institutional survival or personal prestige.

6.2 Naam as Antidote to Māyā: Freedom from Ethical Distortion (Saloks 11, 14, 19, 55)

The second subgroup directly parallels the thematic insights of the Māyā paper. If Māyā distorts perception by elevating wealth, status, and relational attachment to ultimate significance, Naam reorders these priorities.

- **Salok 11** stresses that life devoid of remembrance is spiritually barren, however externally successful it may appear.
- **Salok 14** highlights the ephemeral nature of worldly pleasure and identifies remembrance as the path to liberation.
- **Salok 19** presents Naam as the true companion, contrasting it with unreliable worldly associations.
- **Salok 55** reiterates that only through remembrance can attachment be overcome and moral clarity restored.

These saloks frame Naam as corrective vision. Māyā does not merely deceive intellectually; it seduces affectively. Naam counters this by reshaping desire itself. The ethical distortion diagnosed in the previous paper—performance obsession, metric-driven identity, prestige anxiety—finds its remedy not in stricter policy but in transformed orientation. Naam relativizes institutional ego and situates achievement within a larger moral horizon.

For leadership formation, this subgroup demonstrates that ethical reform cannot rely solely on discernment (Bibek). Discernment identifies illusion; Naam neutralizes its hold. Without Naam, leaders may recognize distortion yet remain attached to it.

6.3 Naam as Ontological Alignment: Recognition of Divine Pervasiveness (Saloks 34, 38, 43, 50, 54)

The third subgroup deepens the theological and philosophical dimension of the theme. Here Naam is not merely refuge or remedy; it is ontological participation in Divine Reality.

- **Salok 34** affirms Divine sovereignty, situating human agency within a larger cosmic order.
- **Salok 38** emphasizes Divine sustenance of all beings, cultivating humility and gratitude.
- **Salok 43** reflects on Divine pervasiveness, dissolving hierarchical ego consciousness.
- **Salok 50** presents God as liberator and sustainer, grounding ethical hope.

- **Salok 54** describes the Divine as the true friend and companion beyond worldly fluctuation.

This cluster articulates a metaphysical framework in which Naam becomes conscious attunement to the Real. Leadership, therefore, is not self-generated authority but entrusted responsibility. Ego diminishes not through repression but through recognition of Divine centrality.

Within higher education, where leadership often equates to control, strategic manoeuvring, and reputational management, these saloks propose a radically different anthropology: authority grounded in humility, governance shaped by accountability to transcendent moral order, and institutional decision-making informed by reverence rather than ambition.

6.4 Naam as Culminating Liberation: From Surrender to Freedom (Salok 57, read integratively with 6, 14, 55)

The final subgroup culminates the pedagogical sequence.

- **Salok 57** presents surrender to the Divine as liberation from bondage.
- When read alongside **Saloks 6, 14, and 55**, a coherent arc emerges: life is fleeting; attachment binds; remembrance frees.

Here Naam is portrayed not merely as remembrance but as existential surrender. This surrender is not passivity; it is release from egoic control. Freedom arises not through domination of circumstances but through relinquishment of illusion.

In leadership terms, this is transformative. Leaders often cling to control, fearing loss of relevance or authority. The saloks invert this paradigm: true authority arises from surrender. Leadership becomes service rather than self-preservation. Institutional integrity emerges not from rigid enforcement but from moral authenticity.

Integrative Thematic Insight

Across these four subgroups, a coherent pedagogical movement becomes visible:

1. **Naam as existential anchor** (freedom from fear of Kaal)
2. **Naam as ethical corrective** (freedom from Māyā's distortion)
3. **Naam as ontological alignment** (humility within Divine order)
4. **Naam as liberation** (surrender leading to moral freedom)

The textual pattern confirms that Naam in *Salok Mahalla 9* is neither isolated devotional advice nor sectarian exhortation. It is the culminating principle of ethical formation. It integrates existential clarity, moral discernment, and spiritual alignment into a unified anthropology.

Thus, in the broader architecture of this project, Naam does not replace Kaal, Māyā, or Bibek—it completes them. It transforms existential anxiety into fearlessness, exposes and dissolves illusion, stabilizes discernment, and culminates in interior freedom. The subsequent sections

will demonstrate how this textual–thematic architecture bears direct relevance for leadership formation in contemporary Higher Education Institutions.

Ethical Failure in HEIs	**Relevant Salok(s) (Mahalla 9)**	**Core Teaching on Naam**	**Leadership Formation Outcome**
Fear-driven governance (defensive policies, survival anxiety)	3, 6, 33, 47	Remembrance of the Divine dissolves fear of impermanence and death	Fearless yet responsible leadership grounded in existential stability
Prestige obsession and ranking fixation	11, 14, 55	Without Naam, worldly success is spiritually empty	Freedom from validation-seeking; value-driven decision-making
Institutional ego and authority centralization	38, 43, 50	God alone sustains and pervades all; human authority is derivative	Humble governance; shared leadership culture
Moral exhaustion and burnout among administrators	34, 54	Divine remembrance restores interior steadiness and companionship	Sustainable leadership anchored in inner resilience
Compliance culture replacing moral conviction	19, 55	Naam is the true companion; external conformity without remembrance is hollow	Integrity-based rather than performance-based governance
Short-term strategic thinking driven by fear of decline	3, 33, 47	Prepare through remembrance; only Divine reality endures	Long-term moral vision beyond immediate metrics
Leadership insecurity masked as control	6, 14, 57	Surrender to Divine Will liberates from egoic control	Courage without domination; authority through service
Identity fragmentation within institutions	43, 50, 54	Divine pervasiveness unifies fragmented consciousness	Institutional coherence grounded in shared ethical orientation
Ethical reform limited to procedural adjustments	11, 19, 55	Naam transforms orientation, not merely behavior	Inner transformation preceding structural reform
Crisis response marked by panic rather than clarity	3, 34, 47	Steadfast remembrance produces calm amidst uncertainty	Non-reactive, stable crisis leadership

Table 1. Mapping Saloks on Naam to Ethical Failures in Higher Education Leadership

This table demonstrates that Naam in Salok Mahalla 9 is not confined to devotional spirituality but functions as an ethical corrective to contemporary institutional dysfunction. Each ethical failure identified in Higher Education Institutions corresponds to a deeper existential instability—fear, ego, insecurity, or attachment—that the saloks address through remembrance and ontological anchoring. Unlike Kaal (which diagnoses fear) and Māyā (which diagnoses distortion), Naam addresses the *root instability beneath both*: the absence of anchoring in enduring reality. Bibek cultivates discernment; Naam stabilizes it. Thus, the leadership outcomes listed in the final column reflect not managerial techniques but transformed interior orientation.

Part 2

Naam as Ethical Capacity Formation: Ontological Grounding of Leadership Freedom

6.5 From Discernment to Anchoring: Why Bibek Requires Naam

In the previous paper, Bibek/Vairāg was presented as the formation of ethical clarity and detachment. However, discernment alone remains vulnerable unless anchored in enduring reality. A leader may distinguish right from wrong and yet falter under pressure, isolation, or existential anxiety.

Naam, in Salok Mahalla 9, performs a different function:

- It does not merely clarify perception.
- It stabilizes the perceiver.
- It grounds ethical action in Divine remembrance.

Thus, while Bibek forms moral capacity, Naam secures moral freedom.

Leadership implication: Higher education leadership often produces morally competent but existentially exhausted administrators. Naam addresses this exhaustion by anchoring leadership identity beyond role, outcome, or recognition.

6.6 Naam and the Dissolution of Fear-Based Leadership (Saloks 3, 6, 33, 47)

A recurring theme in the Naam-related saloks is the futility of relying on worldly security and the necessity of remembering the Divine before death overtakes consciousness.

These saloks convey that:

- Fear arises from misplaced dependence.

- Security sought in institutions is inherently fragile.
- Only Divine remembrance dissolves existential anxiety.

Ethical Insight: Fear produces control.: Control produces rigidity.: Rigidity produces institutional distrust.

Naam interrupts this chain by liberating the leader from fear of loss, decline, or mortality.

HEI Application:
- Leadership that is not driven by ranking anxiety
- Crisis governance marked by steadiness rather than panic
- Long-term moral vision instead of short-term survival strategy

Naam here functions as existential stabilization.

6.7 Naam and the Relativization of Prestige (Saloks 11, 14, 55)

Several saloks emphasize the emptiness of wealth, honor, and worldly success without Divine remembrance. The message is not anti-worldly but corrective: External accomplishment without spiritual anchoring is hollow.

In higher education, prestige culture manifests as:
- Obsession with global rankings
- Grant-driven identity
- Brand management over moral substance

Naam relativizes these pursuits. It does not negate excellence; it prevents idolatry.

Ethical Capacity Formed:
- Value-based decision-making
- Freedom from validation-seeking
- Institutional humility

Naam thus protects leadership from subtle ego inflation.

6.8 Naam as Interior Companionship and Moral Resilience (Saloks 34, 54, 57)

These saloks describe Divine remembrance as the only true companion when all worldly relations dissolve. This introduces a critical dimension: Leadership is often lonely.

When authority isolates the leader from honest critique and authentic community, moral fatigue sets in. Naam reframes solitude: Aloneness becomes communion. This produces:

- Emotional steadiness under criticism
- Endurance during institutional crises
- Compassion without dependency

Naam therefore becomes the ground of sustainable leadership rather than episodic courage.

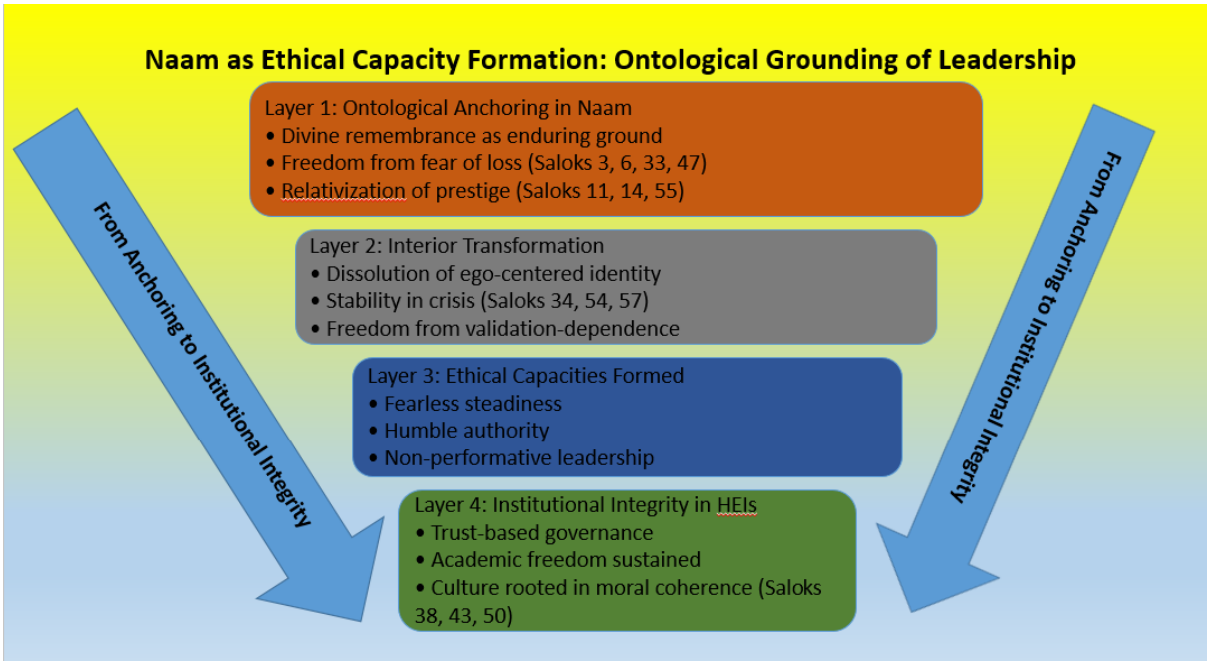

Figure 1. Naam as Ethical Capacity Formation: From Ontological Anchoring to Institutional Integrity in Higher Education

This figure presents Naam as the culminating stage of ethical formation in leadership development. The model progresses from ontological anchoring in Divine remembrance (Naam), which stabilizes the self beyond fear, prestige, and validation, to interior transformation marked by ego-dissolution and emotional steadiness. From this grounding emerge durable ethical capacities—fearless steadiness, humble authority, and non-performative leadership. These inner capacities ultimately manifest institutionally as trust-based governance, sustained academic freedom, and morally coherent institutional culture. The visual structure illustrates that institutional integrity in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) is not produced by policy mechanisms alone but flows from leaders whose identity is anchored in enduring reality rather than transient institutional metrics.

6.9 Naam and Institutional Coherence (Saloks 38, 43, 50)

Some saloks emphasize Divine pervasiveness — the One pervading all beings and structures. This ontological unity has institutional implications.

When leaders internalize Divine pervasiveness:

- Authority becomes stewardship.
- Governance becomes service.
- Institutional culture becomes relational rather than hierarchical.

Fragmentation in HEIs — between faculty and administration, research and teaching, policy and ethics — often reflects fragmented consciousness at the leadership level.

Naam reorients leadership toward unity.

Leadership Outcome:

- Trust-based authority
- Non-coercive governance
- Cultural coherence rooted in shared moral orientation

In the pedagogical progression of Salok Mahalla 9, Kaal destabilizes false security, Māyā exposes distortion, Bibek disciplines moral perception, and Naam stabilizes the self in enduring reality. Without Naam, ethical leadership remains reactive; with Naam, it becomes free.

- If Bibek trains leaders to see clearly, Naam trains them to stand firmly.
- If Māyā exposes illusion, Naam removes the craving that sustains illusion.
- If Kaal awakens leaders to impermanence, Naam anchors them in what endures.
- Thus, Naam is not an optional devotional addendum but the culmination of ethical formation. It transforms moral competence into moral freedom.

Problem Caption	**Description of the Problem**	**Ethical Challenge in HEIs**	**Primary Ethical Distortion**	**Why This Distortion Fits Naam (Absence of Ontological Anchoring)**
Fear-Based Governance	Leadership decisions driven by anxiety over rankings, funding, public image, or decline	Crisis-driven policy shifts; reactive governance	Existential insecurity	Without Naam, leadership seeks security in institutional survival rather than enduring moral grounding
Prestige Fixation	Obsession with global rankings, branding, and reputation	Institutional identity equated with external validation	Idolatry of success	Naam relativizes prestige; its absence absolutizes reputation as ultimate meaning

Problem Caption	**Description of the Problem**	**Ethical Challenge in HEIs**	**Primary Ethical Distortion**	**Why This Distortion Fits Naam (Absence of Ontological Anchoring)**
Moral Exhaustion	Administrative burnout and emotional fatigue	Ethical apathy; loss of conviction	Spiritual depletion	Naam provides interior companionship and resilience; without it, leadership collapses into fatigue
Performative Ethics	Public display of values without inner transformation	Compliance culture replacing conviction	Externalized morality	Naam transforms orientation, not merely outward behavior; absence reduces ethics to performance
Control-Centered Authority	Over-centralization of decision-making power	Suppression of dissent; diminished academic freedom	Ego-preservation	Naam dissolves egoic control; its absence fuels domination as a substitute for security
Policy Without Moral Vision	Administrative reforms lacking ethical depth	Procedural correctness without moral coherence	Technocratic reductionism	Naam anchors leadership in transcendent moral horizon; absence narrows governance to technique
Identity Fragmentation	Disconnect between mission statements and lived culture	Institutional incoherence	Disintegrated self-understanding	Naam affirms unity under Divine pervasiveness; absence leads to fragmentation
Short-Termism	Focus on immediate metrics over long-term formation	Erosion of institutional legacy	Temporal anxiety	Naam anchors leadership in enduring reality beyond temporal fluctuation
Authority as Self-Preservation	Leadership clinging to position and recognition	Defensive institutional politics	Fear of irrelevance	Naam shifts identity from role-based authority to

Problem Caption	Description of the Problem	Ethical Challenge in HEIs	Primary Ethical Distortion	Why This Distortion Fits Naam (Absence of Ontological Anchoring)
				surrendered stewardship
Crisis Panic	Institutional instability during controversy or external pressure	Reactionary decision-making	Lack of interior steadiness	Naam cultivates calm rooted in Divine remembrance; absence leads to panic governance

Table 2. Ethical and Leadership Challenges in Contemporary Higher Education Institutions (Naam Lens)

Brief Analytical Description of Table: This table demonstrates that many contemporary leadership failures in Higher Education Institutions are not primarily procedural deficiencies but manifestations of existential instability. Unlike the Māyā table, which emphasized illusion and attachment, and the Bibek table, which emphasized discernment and moral capacity, the Naam lens reveals a deeper absence: lack of anchoring in enduring reality.

The ethical distortions identified—prestige fixation, control-centered authority, performative ethics, moral exhaustion—reflect leadership identities constructed upon fragile external markers. Naam, as presented in Salok Mahalla 9, functions as the stabilizing ground that prevents such distortions. Where Naam is internalized, leadership becomes steady, humble, and non-reactive; where it is absent, governance oscillates between fear and self-preservation. Thus, this table supports the broader thesis of the paper: ethical reform in higher education cannot be sustained by structural adjustments alone; it requires ontological anchoring.

Summary

This chapter examined **Naam as the culminating dimension of ethical formation in Salok Mahalla 9**, arguing that authentic moral freedom emerges not merely from ethical awareness or discernment but from **ontological anchoring in Divine remembrance**. Building upon the previous chapter's analysis of *Bibek–Vairāg* as the cultivation of discernment and detachment, the present study demonstrated that Naam stabilizes these capacities by grounding ethical agency in enduring reality rather than in fluctuating psychological or institutional conditions. In this sense, Naam functions not simply as a devotional practice but as a **transformative principle of leadership formation**, producing interior steadiness, non-performative integrity, and sustainable institutional legitimacy.

The chapter was organized into two major parts. **Part I** provided a thematic–ethical analysis of fourteen Naam-related saloks (3, 6, 11, 14, 19, 33, 34, 38, 43, 47, 50, 54, 55, and 57), demonstrating that remembrance of the Divine forms the ontological ground of ethical stability. The analysis identified four interrelated thematic movements within these saloks. First, Naam was presented as **existential anchoring**, dissolving fear of mortality and freeing individuals from anxiety generated by the inevitability of *Kaal*. Second, Naam functioned as an **ethical corrective to Māyā**, relativizing worldly success, prestige, and institutional validation. Third, the saloks articulated Naam as **ontological alignment with Divine reality**, cultivating humility and recognition of the limits of human authority. Finally, the progression culminated in **liberation through surrender**, where remembrance becomes the path through which the ego relinquishes control and authentic moral freedom emerges.

Taken together, these thematic clusters revealed that Naam integrates the earlier ethical insights of the project. Whereas *Kaal* exposes existential insecurity, *Māyā* reveals the distortions generated by attachment, and *Bibek/Vairāg* cultivates discernment and detachment, Naam **completes the pedagogical sequence** by stabilizing the self in Divine remembrance. The analysis therefore demonstrated that Naam is not an isolated devotional exhortation but the **culminating principle of ethical formation within Salok Mahalla 9**.

To connect these scriptural insights with contemporary institutional challenges, **Table 1 mapped the Naam-related saloks onto specific ethical failures within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)**. The table illustrated how common leadership problems—fear-driven governance, prestige fixation, institutional ego, moral exhaustion, and performative ethics—reflect deeper existential instability rather than purely administrative deficiencies. The teachings on Naam provide an ethical corrective by cultivating interior anchoring, humility, and moral courage. Through this mapping, the chapter demonstrated that the wisdom of Salok Mahalla 9 addresses not only personal spirituality but also structural dysfunction in modern academic leadership.

Part II extended the analysis from scriptural hermeneutics to leadership formation, arguing that Naam transforms ethical capacity into moral freedom. While *Bibek* enables leaders to recognize ethical distortion, Naam stabilizes the leader's identity beyond role, reputation, or institutional success. This anchoring dissolves fear-based leadership patterns that often dominate higher education governance, including reactive decision-making, prestige-driven policy, and defensive institutional control. The discussion showed that remembrance of the Divine fosters interior companionship, emotional resilience, and humility, allowing leaders to exercise authority without domination and responsibility without anxiety.

The integrative logic of this transformation was visually synthesized in **Figure 1**, which presented Naam as the culminating stage of ethical capacity formation. The figure illustrated a progression from ontological anchoring in Divine remembrance to interior transformation and the development of enduring leadership capacities—fearless steadiness, humble authority, and non-performative integrity. These capacities ultimately manifest institutionally as trust-based governance, sustained academic freedom, and morally coherent organizational culture. The

model therefore demonstrates that institutional integrity emerges not from procedural reform alone but from **leaders whose identity is anchored in enduring reality**.

The broader institutional implications of this framework were further elaborated in **Table2**, which examined ethical and leadership challenges within contemporary higher education through the lens of Naam. The table identified recurring distortions such as prestige fixation, moral exhaustion, performative ethics, control-centered authority, short-term strategic thinking, and crisis-driven governance. These patterns were interpreted not merely as managerial failures but as manifestations of **leadership identities formed without existential anchoring**. In contrast, the ethical orientation cultivated through Naam generates steadiness, humility, and moral clarity, enabling leaders to guide institutions through uncertainty without resorting to defensive or ego-driven decision-making.

The analysis therefore supports the chapter's central claim: **ethical reform in higher education cannot be sustained by structural or procedural adjustments alone**. While policies and governance frameworks remain important, they cannot compensate for the absence of interior formation. Naam addresses this deeper dimension by grounding leadership identity in a transcendent moral horizon that relativizes fear, prestige, and institutional self-preservation.

In the broader architecture of this study, Naam thus emerges as the **culminating principle within the Gurmat framework of ethical leadership formation**. It integrates the existential awareness awakened through *Kaal*, the ethical clarity produced through exposure of *Māyā*, and the discernment cultivated through *Bibek/Vairāg*. Through remembrance and surrender, Naam stabilizes these insights and transforms them into enduring moral freedom. Leadership shaped by Naam therefore acts not from insecurity or ambition but from interior steadiness and humility.

Ultimately, the pedagogical vision of Salok Mahalla 9 suggests that authentic leadership is not constructed primarily through managerial competence or strategic expertise. Rather, it arises from **inner transformation grounded in Divine remembrance**. Where Naam anchors the leader, authority becomes stewardship, governance becomes service, and institutional legitimacy emerges from ethical authenticity rather than external validation.

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Part IV

Institutional Application

From Ethical Insight to Leadership Formation in Universities

The insights developed in the preceding chapters invite an important question: how can the ethical vision articulated in the teachings of Guru Tegh Bahadur inform the formation of leadership within contemporary universities? Part IV addresses this question by translating philosophical insight into institutional application, exploring how ethical leadership formation may be cultivated within Higher Education Institutions.

The preceding parts of this study have explored the ethical and philosophical insights embedded in the teachings of Guru Tegh Bahadur, particularly as articulated in Salok Mahalla 9. Through an examination of themes such as impermanence, illusion, discernment, and moral freedom, the earlier chapters have argued that these teachings provide a profound ethical anthropology. They illuminate how human judgment becomes shaped by fear, attachment, and illusion, while also pointing toward the interior capacities through which ethical clarity and moral freedom can emerge.

Part IV turns from philosophical analysis to **institutional application**. The central question addressed in this section is how the ethical insights explored in the preceding chapters can be translated into the practical domain of leadership formation within contemporary Higher Education Institutions. Universities today operate within increasingly complex environments characterized by institutional competition, performance metrics, bureaucratic expansion, and reputational pressures. In such contexts, leadership decisions are often influenced by structural incentives that reward institutional visibility, prestige, and short-term outcomes. As a result, many governance failures that appear as administrative or policy breakdowns can be traced to deeper issues in the ethical formation of leadership itself.

This part therefore approaches institutional leadership not merely as a managerial function but as a problem of **ethical formation**. Institutional structures and regulatory frameworks may guide behaviour, but they cannot fully prevent ethical distortion if leaders themselves remain shaped by fear, ambition, or institutional illusion. Conversely, when leadership is grounded in discernment, detachment, and moral anchoring, institutional governance becomes capable of sustaining integrity even under conditions of uncertainty and pressure.

The three chapters in this part progressively develop a framework for translating ethical insight into institutional practice.

Chapter 7 establishes the conceptual bridge between ethical anthropology and institutional leadership. It explores how the moral and existential insights derived from the teachings of Guru Tegh Bahadur can illuminate the deeper conditions under which leadership either collapses into distortion or emerges as ethical responsibility. By situating leadership within a broader understanding of the human condition, the chapter prepares the ground for the development of a structured approach to leadership formation.

Chapter 8 then advances this discussion by examining the practical architectures through which leadership formation may be implemented within Higher Education Institutions. It proposes training models, comparative frameworks, and measurement approaches that allow ethical capacities to be cultivated and evaluated in institutional settings. Rather than reducing leadership development to managerial training, the chapter presents leadership formation as a deliberate process of ethical cultivation.

Chapter 9 culminates the discussion through an integrative synthesis that draws together the insights developed throughout the study. Interpreting institutional failure as a consequence of deeper anthropological misformation, the chapter proposes a comprehensive framework for ethical leadership formation grounded in the Gurmat tradition. The resulting **Gurmat Leadership Architecture** presents a progression from existential awareness to moral freedom, demonstrating how leadership formation can ultimately contribute to institutional coherence and integrity.

Taken together, these chapters illustrate how the ethical vision articulated by Guru Tegh Bahadur can be translated into a meaningful framework for leadership development in contemporary universities. By integrating philosophical insight with institutional design, Part IV seeks to demonstrate that ethical leadership in higher education cannot be sustained solely through structural reforms or regulatory oversight. Rather, it requires a deeper commitment to cultivating leaders whose judgment is shaped by discernment, moral courage, and interior ethical steadiness.

Part IV therefore represents the culmination of the study's central argument: that institutional integrity in universities ultimately depends upon the ethical formation of leadership. When leadership development engages the deeper questions of human vulnerability, illusion, discernment, and moral freedom, universities can nurture leaders capable of sustaining both academic responsibility and institutional trust in an increasingly complex world.

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Chapter 7

From Anxiety to Freedom: The Ethical Pedagogy of Salok Mahalla 9

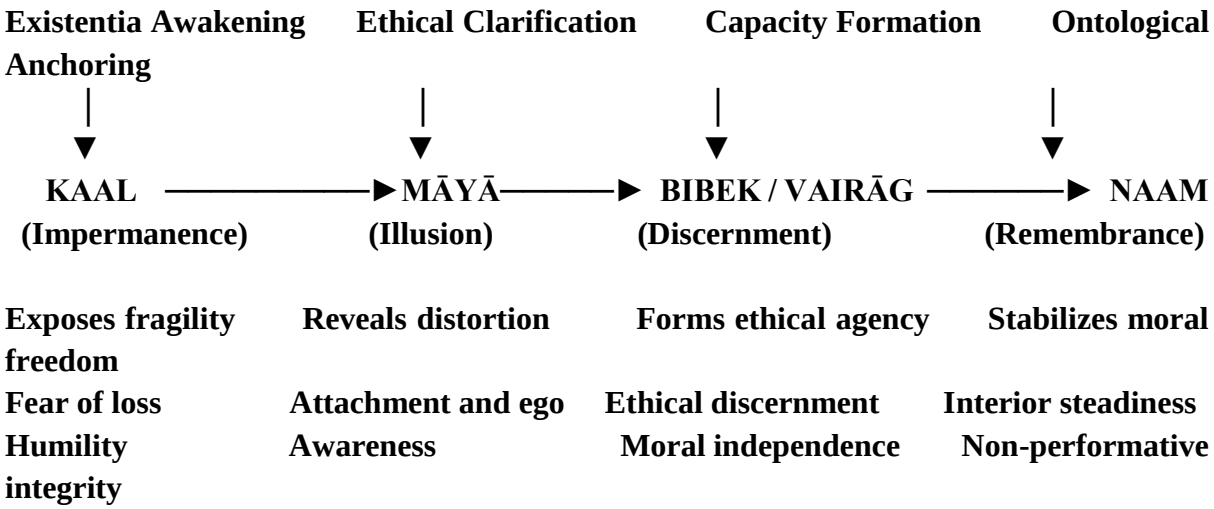
7.1 Introduction: Integrating the Four Themes

The preceding chapters of this study have examined four major themes within *Salok Mahalla 9*—Kaal, Māyā, Bibek/Vairāg, and Naam—as components of an integrated ethical pedagogy. While each chapter analyzed these themes individually, their full significance becomes evident only when viewed together as a structured progression of leadership formation. This chapter synthesizes the insights of Chapters 3 through 6, demonstrating that the four themes collectively articulate a coherent framework through which ethical leadership emerges.

The progression across the four themes now becomes structurally complete:

Kaal → Anxiety exposed • Māyā → Distortion revealed • Bibek → Discernment formed • Naam → Freedom stabilized

In this progression, *Salok Mahalla 9* does not simply offer devotional reflection but presents a pedagogical movement from existential diagnosis to moral liberation. Leadership crises, therefore, are not understood merely as administrative failures but as symptoms of deeper existential and ethical misformation.



The Four-Stage Ethical Pedagogy of *Salok Mahalla 9*

This model visually represents the **pedagogical progression of ethical formation** across the four thematic stages identified in the dissertation: **Kaal, Māyā, Bibek/Vairāg, and Naam**. This figure illustrates that the ethical framework embedded in *Salok Mahalla 9* unfolds through a **pedagogical movement rather than a collection of isolated teachings**.

The process begins with **Kaal**, which awakens awareness of impermanence and destabilizes illusions of permanence in leadership structures. This existential confrontation produces humility and exposes the fragility of power and status.

The second stage, **Māyā**, reveals how attachment, ego, and material aspiration distort moral perception. Here the ethical problem shifts from fear to **misperception**, highlighting the psychological conditions that corrupt judgment.

The third stage introduces **Bibek (discernment) and Vairāg (detachment)** as ethical capacities that allow individuals to navigate these conditions. Through disciplined perception and detachment from self-interest, leaders develop the ability to act with moral independence.

Finally, the pedagogical movement culminates in **Naam**, which provides the **ontological anchoring necessary for sustained ethical integrity**. Through remembrance of the Divine, leadership becomes internally stabilized, freeing ethical action from dependence on recognition, status, or institutional reward.

Thus, the model demonstrates that the ethical vision of *Salok Mahalla 9* progresses from **existential awakening to moral freedom**, forming an integrated model of ethical formation.

7.2 Kaal: Anxiety Exposed

The first stage of this pedagogical sequence confronts the reality of **Kaal**, or the inevitability of mortality and impermanence. In Chapter 3, Kaal was interpreted not simply as a metaphysical concept but as an existential lens through which leadership insecurity becomes visible. Awareness of impermanence exposes the fragile foundations upon which many forms of authority and institutional legitimacy are constructed.

Within institutional contexts such as higher education, fear of decline, loss of reputation, or organizational instability often produces defensive governance. Policies become reactive, authority becomes protective, and decision-making becomes driven by anxiety rather than ethical clarity. The theme of Kaal reveals this hidden dynamic by confronting leaders with the inevitability of loss and change. However, this confrontation does not aim to produce despair. Instead, it functions as an awakening. By recognizing the impermanence of worldly security, leaders become capable of confronting fear rather than unconsciously reproducing it through institutional structures.

7.3 Māyā: Distortion Revealed

If Kaal exposes anxiety, the theme of **Māyā** reveals how that anxiety becomes institutionalized through distortion. Chapter 4 demonstrated that Māyā operates not merely as illusion but as a

misalignment of priorities, in which prestige, reputation, and material success acquire exaggerated significance.

Within contemporary higher education, such distortion frequently manifests in the form of prestige obsession, ranking fixation, and performance metrics that substitute external validation for substantive ethical purpose. Institutions may equate success with visibility, growth, or funding, while neglecting deeper commitments to intellectual integrity, social responsibility, and moral formation.

Māyā thus reveals how fear of impermanence becomes transformed into attachment to prestige and validation. Ethical distortion emerges not because leaders lack intelligence or competence, but because institutional identity becomes entangled with external recognition.
Recognizing Māyā therefore represents a crucial stage in ethical awakening. It exposes the illusions that sustain institutional ego and prepares the ground for genuine ethical transformation.

7.4 Bibek–Vairāg: Discernment Formed

While the themes of Kaal and Māyā diagnose the existential and ethical problems underlying leadership crises, **Bibek–Vairāg** introduces the constructive dimension of ethical formation. As discussed in Chapter 5, Bibek refers to discernment—the capacity to distinguish between truth and illusion—while Vairāg represents detachment from ego-driven attachment.

Together, these capacities cultivate **moral vigilance, ego relativization, and ethical capacity formation**. Leaders trained in discernment learn to recognize the subtle ways in which ambition, prestige, and institutional pressure distort ethical judgment. Detachment then enables them to act upon ethical insight without becoming captive to these pressures.

At this stage, leadership acquires the capacity for principled decision-making. However, discernment alone remains fragile if it lacks deeper anchoring. Leaders may understand what is ethically right yet still hesitate when confronted with fear, isolation, or institutional resistance. Ethical clarity must therefore be stabilized through a deeper transformation of the self.

7.5 Naam: Freedom Stabilized

The culmination of this pedagogical sequence occurs in **Naam**, which provides the ontological anchoring necessary for enduring moral freedom. As demonstrated in Chapter 6, Naam represents remembrance of the Divine and alignment with a reality that transcends institutional success, personal reputation, and worldly attachment.

Through this anchoring, ethical action becomes liberated from the anxieties that often undermine leadership integrity. Interior steadiness replaces fear-driven decision-making,

humility replaces ego-centered authority, and moral conviction replaces performative compliance.

Naam therefore represents not the beginning of reform but its culmination. Where Kaal awakens leaders to impermanence, Māyā exposes illusion, and Bibek/Vairāg cultivates ethical capacity, Naam stabilizes the self within a deeper spiritual horizon. Ethical leadership thus becomes an expression of interior freedom rather than external obligation.

7.6 The Pedagogical Funnel: From Diagnosis to Liberation

The progression across these four themes can be visualized through a pedagogical funnel that synthesizes the ethical architecture developed throughout this study.

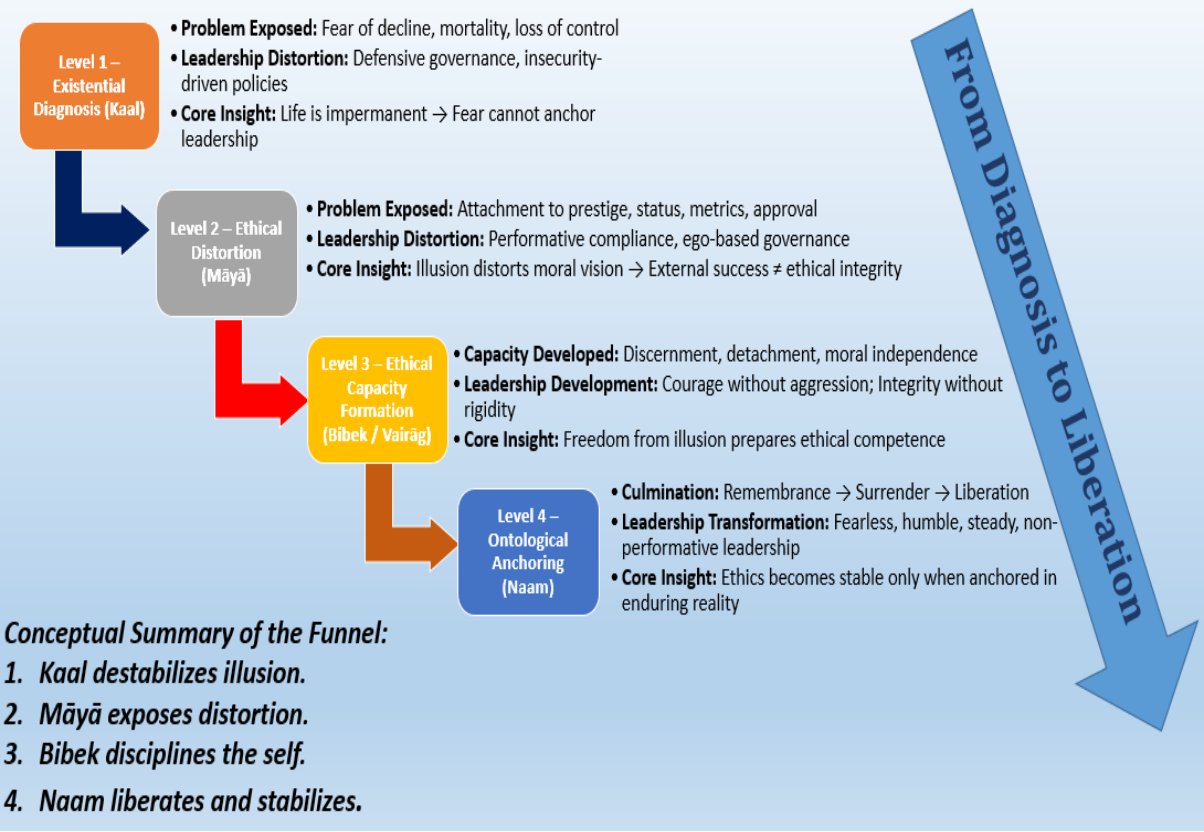


Figure 1. Pedagogical Funnel: From Diagnosis to Liberation

This pedagogical funnel visually synthesizes the ethical architecture developed across the four thematic studies of *Salok Mahalla 9*. The movement begins with Kaal, which confronts leadership with the reality of impermanence and exposes fear as the hidden driver of defensive governance. It proceeds to Māyā, where attachment to prestige, metrics, and validation is identified as the source of ethical distortion. Through Bibek/Vairāg, the leader cultivates discernment and detachment, forming moral independence and courage. The culmination

occurs in Naam, where remembrance and surrender anchor the self in Divine Reality, transforming ethical competence into enduring moral freedom.

The funnel therefore illustrates a structured progression from existential diagnosis to ontological liberation, suggesting that institutional integrity in Higher Education Institutions cannot be sustained by policy reform alone but must arise from inner formation grounded in spiritual anchoring.

7.7 Comparative Ethical Architecture Across the Four Themes

The relationships among these themes can also be examined through a comparative ethical framework that highlights their distinct yet interconnected contributions to leadership formation.

Dimension	Kaal	Māyā	Bibek / Vairāg	Naam
Core Question	Why does leadership become fearful?	Why does leadership become distorted?	How does leadership become capable?	How does leadership become free?
Primary Diagnosis	Impermanence	Illusion & attachment	Ethical confusion	Existential instability
Psychological Root	Fear of loss	Desire for validation	Moral inconsistency	Lack of anchoring
Institutional Manifestation	Defensive governance	Prestige obsession	Hesitant integrity	Moral exhaustion
Ethical Distortion	Anxiety-driven decisions	Performative compliance	Compromise under pressure	Hollow reform
Spiritual Corrective	Awareness of mortality	Recognition of illusion	Discernment & detachment	Remembrance & surrender
Leadership Formation Stage	Existential awakening	Ethical clarity	Moral capacity	Moral freedom
Mode of Transformation	Confrontation	Exposure	Discipline	Liberation
Resulting Leadership Quality	Sobriety	Priority realignment	Courage	Steadfast freedom
Institutional Outcome	Realistic governance	Integrity restoration	Ethical governance	Trust-based legitimacy

Table 1: Comparative Ethical Architecture Across Four Themes (Kaal, Māyā, Bibek/ Vairāg, Naam)

This comparative framework demonstrates that each theme addresses a specific dimension of leadership distortion and transformation. Kaal confronts fear, Māyā exposes illusion, Bibek/Vairāg cultivates discernment and detachment, and Naam stabilizes ethical freedom. Together they form a coherent pedagogical structure through which leadership evolves from anxiety and distortion toward moral clarity and liberation.

7.8 Implications for Leadership in Higher Education

When interpreted through the lens of contemporary higher education, this pedagogical sequence offers a distinctive framework for leadership formation. Institutional crises—manifested in prestige competition, reactive governance, and ethical fatigue—often reflect deeper existential insecurity among leaders.

The ethical pedagogy of *Salok Mahalla 9* suggests that sustainable reform cannot rely solely on procedural adjustments or regulatory oversight. Instead, it requires leaders who undergo a process of interior transformation. By confronting impermanence, recognizing illusion, cultivating discernment, and anchoring themselves in enduring reality, leaders develop the moral resilience necessary to guide institutions responsibly.

Leadership formed through this progression is characterized by sobriety, humility, courage, and steadiness—qualities that foster trust-based legitimacy within academic communities.

Dimension	Kaal (Chapter 2)	Māyā (Chapter 3)	Bibek / Vairāg (Chapter 5)	Naam (Chapter 6)
Ethical Category	Ontological diagnosis	Psychological–ethical distortion	Ethical capacity formation	Ontological anchoring of ethical freedom
Central Question	Why does leadership become fearful?	Why does leadership become distorted?	How does leadership become capable?	How does leadership remain ethically free and steady?
Primary Human Condition Addressed	Impermanence and mortality	Illusion, attachment, and egoic desire	Discernment and detachment	Interior anchoring in the Divine
Function in Ethical Pedagogy	Exposes existential fragility	Reveals distortion of perception	Forms ethical agency	Stabilizes ethical integrity
Core Ethical Problem	False sense of permanence	Misperception of reality	Inability to act ethically under pressure	Loss of interior grounding
Mode of Ethical Failure	Fear and insecurity	Confusion and rationalization	Ethical instability and hesitation	Performative or opportunistic ethics

Role of Ego	Humbled by time and death	Inflated through illusion	Disciplined and relativized	Dissolved through remembrance
Relation to Power and Status	Exposed as temporary	Revealed as deceptive	Rendered non-determinative	Ethically neutralized
Ethical Mechanism	Existential awareness	Critical exposure of illusion	Disciplined moral perception	Continuous remembrance of the Divine
Interior Moral Process	Awakening to mortality	Recognition of attachment	Cultivation of discernment	Interior steadiness and presence
Leadership Risk Identified	Fear-based governance	Distorted judgment	Inconsistent ethical action	Instrumental or performative leadership
Leadership Capacity Developed	Humility	Ethical awareness	Moral independence	Non-performative integrity
Ethical Orientation	Diagnostic	Corrective	Formative	Anchoring / Sustaining
Institutional Distortion if Ignored	Collapse through fear	Corruption through illusion	Ethical paralysis	Institutional instability
Institutional Outcome if Integrated	Realistic leadership	Clarity of purpose	Ethical resilience	Institutional legitimacy
Representative Salok Clusters	1, 7, 17, 21, 30, 46	4, 10, 25, 32, 35, 42	12, 23, 31, 36, 45, 56	3, 6, 11, 14, 19, 33, 34, 38, 43, 47, 50, 54, 55, 57
Pedagogical Movement	Confrontation with impermanence	Exposure of illusion	Formation of discernment	Stabilization through remembrance
Leadership Formation Stage	Existential awakening	Ethical clarification	Capacity formation	Moral freedom and steadiness

Table2: Integrated Ethical Framework of Kaal, Māyā, Bibek/Vairāg, and Naam in *Salok Mahalla 9*

Analytical Interpretation of the Fourfold Ethical Framework: The comparative framework presented above demonstrates that the four ethical categories examined across the dissertation—**Kaal, Māyā, Bibek/Vairāg, and Naam**—do not function as isolated doctrinal

themes but as **interrelated stages within a coherent ethical pedagogy embedded in *Salok Mahalla 9*.**

1. Ontological Diagnosis: Kaal

The first movement begins with **Kaal**, which confronts human consciousness with the inevitability of time, mortality, and impermanence. In ethical terms, Kaal functions as a **diagnostic revelation**, exposing the fragility of leadership structures built upon illusions of permanence, status, and power. By destabilizing these assumptions, Kaal initiates a process of existential humility necessary for ethical awakening.

2. Ethical Exposure: Māyā

The second movement addresses the **psychological and perceptual distortions produced by Māyā**. If Kaal reveals the fragility of worldly structures, Māyā reveals how attachment, illusion, and ego obscure moral perception. Leadership failures in this stage emerge not primarily from fear but from **distorted understanding**, where material gain, prestige, and self-interest obscure ethical clarity.

3. Ethical Capacity Formation: Bibek and Vairāg

The third movement introduces **Bibek (discernment) and Vairāg (detachment)** as the internal capacities required for ethical agency. Having recognized both existential fragility and perceptual distortion, the leader must cultivate the ability to distinguish between truth and illusion, right and expediency. Bibek provides moral clarity, while Vairāg prevents attachment to outcomes, recognition, or institutional reward. Together they form the **ethical competence necessary for principled action**.

4. Ontological Anchoring: Naam

The final movement culminates in **Naam**, which functions not merely as devotional practice but as the **ontological grounding that stabilizes ethical freedom**. While Bibek and Vairāg enable moral action, Naam sustains the **interior steadiness** required for ethical consistency. Through remembrance of the Divine, leadership becomes rooted in an identity that transcends institutional reward, public approval, and personal ambition.

In this sense, Naam transforms ethics from **effort-based morality into anchored integrity**. Ethical action ceases to be performative or strategic and instead emerges naturally from an interior orientation grounded in the Divine.

Integrated Ethical Pedagogy of Salok Mahalla 9

When viewed together, the four themes form a **progressive yet integrated ethical formation model**:

1. **Kaal** awakens awareness of impermanence.
2. **Māyā** exposes the distortions of ego and attachment.
3. **Bibek/Vairāg** cultivate the capacity for ethical discernment and detachment.
4. **Naam** anchors ethical life in a stable ontological foundation.

This progression demonstrates that ethical leadership, within the framework of *Salok Mahalla 9*, is not achieved through procedural rules or institutional regulations alone. Rather, it emerges from a **transformative interior process that integrates existential awareness, critical perception, moral capacity, and spiritual anchoring**.

7.9 Institutional Implication for Higher Education Leadership

The framework also clarifies why leadership crises within Higher Education Institutions often persist despite structural reforms. Policies may address governance procedures, but without **interior ethical formation**, leaders remain vulnerable to fear, illusion, ego, and instability.
Within this fourfold ethical pedagogy:

- **Kaal** cultivates humility in leadership authority.
- **Māyā** develops critical awareness of institutional illusions such as prestige and competition.
- **Bibek/Vairāg** form the capacity for principled decision-making under pressure.
- **Naam** provides the interior grounding that sustains integrity beyond external accountability.

Consequently, Naam emerges as the **ethical culmination** of the entire framework: the point at which leadership becomes internally stabilized and ethically free.

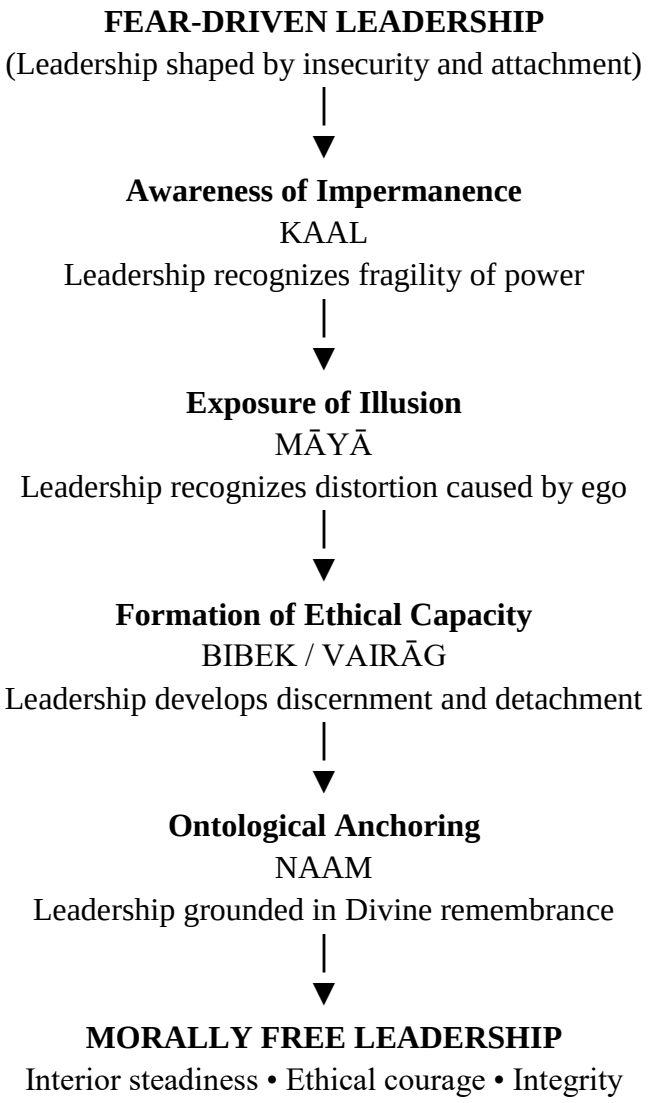
This model synthesizes the **entire thesis argument** by illustrating how the four ethical themes collectively transform leadership from **fear-driven governance to morally anchored leadership**.

This model depicts the **transformational trajectory** articulated throughout the dissertation. Leadership initially operates within conditions shaped by fear, attachment, and institutional pressure. These conditions often produce governance characterized by insecurity, self-protection, and ethical compromise.

The ethical pedagogy of *Salok Mahalla 9* addresses these conditions sequentially.

- The recognition of **Kaal** disrupts illusions of permanence and confronts leaders with the reality of mortality and impermanence. This awareness produces humility and weakens the psychological hold of power and status.
- The exposure of **Māyā** then reveals how attachment, ego, and social ambition distort moral judgment. Leaders begin to see the subtle mechanisms through which institutional power can corrupt ethical clarity.
- In response, **Bibek and Vairāg** cultivate the internal capacities required for ethical action. Discernment enables leaders to perceive truth within complex situations, while detachment prevents ethical compromise driven by personal gain or fear of loss.

- The process culminates in **Naam**, which provides the ontological grounding necessary for sustained ethical freedom. Through remembrance of the Divine, ethical action becomes rooted in interior steadiness rather than external validation.



From Fear to Freedom: Ethical Formation Model for Leadership

The result is **morally free leadership**, characterized by integrity, courage, and stability. Such leadership not only transforms the individual leader but also contributes to **institutional legitimacy and ethical resilience within Higher Education Institutions**.

7.10 Conclusion

The analysis presented in this chapter demonstrates that *Salok Mahalla 9* articulates a coherent ethical pedagogy of leadership formation. Through the sequential themes of Kaal, Māyā,

Bibek/Vairāg, and Naam, the text guides the leader from existential awareness to moral freedom.

This progression reveals that leadership crises are rarely accidental or purely procedural. Rather, they arise from deeper existential and ontological misformation. Authentic reform therefore requires interior transformation before structural adjustment.

Within this framework, ethical leadership emerges not from managerial expertise alone but from a disciplined process of discernment, detachment, and spiritual anchoring. By integrating these capacities, leaders become capable of exercising authority with humility, guiding institutions with integrity, and sustaining communities of trust within the complex landscape of contemporary higher education.

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Chapter 8

Leadership Formation in Higher Education Institutions through the Ethical Architecture of Salok Mahalla 9

8.1. Introduction: Ethical Architecture of Leadership Formation

1 Purpose

The purpose of this chapter is to translate the ethical insights of *Salok Mahalla 9* into a coherent framework for leadership formation within contemporary Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). While the preceding chapters examined the philosophical, ethical, and theological dimensions of the text, the present chapter moves from interpretive analysis to applied synthesis. It demonstrates how the ethical architecture embedded within *Salok Mahalla 9* may inform leadership formation in institutional contexts characterized by complexity, competition, and moral ambiguity.

The chapter argues that *Salok Mahalla 9* presents a structured ethical pedagogy that progresses from existential diagnosis to moral freedom. This progression unfolds through four interconnected ethical lenses: **Kaal (impermanence), Māyā (illusion), Bibek/Vairāg (discernment and detachment), and Naam (ontological anchoring)**. Together, these themes constitute an integrated architecture of ethical formation rather than a collection of independent devotional reflections. Each lens performs a distinct pedagogical function within the process of leadership development: Kaal confronts human beings with the reality of impermanence; Māyā exposes the distortions produced by attachment and ego; Bibek and Vairāg cultivate the interior capacities required for principled ethical judgment; and Naam provides the ontological anchoring through which ethical action becomes internally stabilized and enduring.

Building upon this architecture, the chapter seeks to demonstrate that leadership crises in higher education are not solely administrative or procedural in nature but are often rooted in deeper existential and ethical disorientation. Contemporary leadership development programs frequently emphasize managerial competence, strategic planning, and regulatory compliance. While these skills are necessary, they do not adequately address the interior formation of the leader. The ethical instability observed in many institutional contexts therefore reflects a gap between technical capability and moral grounding.

Against this background, the chapter proposes that the pedagogical progression articulated in *Salok Mahalla 9* offers a formation-based model of leadership development. Rather than focusing primarily on institutional mechanisms of control, this approach emphasizes the cultivation of ethical clarity, moral independence, and interior steadiness within the leader. When such formation precedes administrative practice, institutional integrity becomes a natural consequence rather than a regulatory imposition.

To develop this argument, the chapter undertakes three interrelated tasks. First, it presents an integrative synthesis of the four thematic lenses identified in the earlier chapters, demonstrating how they together form a coherent ethical architecture. Second, it examines each lens independently as a framework for leadership formation in Higher Education Institutions, discussing the need for the lens, the core ethical capacities it cultivates, the leadership formation model it suggests, and its implications for leadership training programs in HEIs. Third, the chapter articulates the integrative contributions, theoretical significance, and practical scope of this formation-based leadership framework while also acknowledging its limitations.

In doing so, the chapter seeks to contribute to leadership studies by reframing ethics not merely as regulatory compliance but as a process of interior formation grounded in ontological clarity. It also demonstrates how insights derived from Gurmat thought may be translated into a non-sectarian leadership formation model capable of informing ethical leadership education within pluralistic academic environments.

The overall aim of the chapter is therefore to show that the ethical pedagogy of *Salok Mahalla 9* provides a structured pathway through which leadership may move from existential awareness to ethical clarity and ultimately toward moral freedom—an orientation that holds significant implications for the cultivation of trustworthy and ethically grounded leadership within Higher Education Institutions.

2 The Ethical Architecture of Salok Mahalla 9

The ethical insights contained within *Salok Mahalla 9* do not appear as isolated spiritual reflections but unfold through a coherent pedagogical structure. When read as a whole, the saloks reveal a progressive architecture of ethical formation that moves from existential awareness to moral freedom. This structure provides the conceptual foundation for the leadership formation framework developed in this chapter.

At the heart of this architecture lies a fourfold movement: **Kaal (impermanence), Māyā (illusion), Bibek/Vairāg (discernment and detachment), and Naam (ontological anchoring)**. These themes do not function as separate doctrinal categories but as sequential stages in a process of ethical awakening and formation. Each stage addresses a distinct dimension of the human condition and prepares the ground for the next, creating a pedagogical

progression that gradually reorients the individual from existential confusion toward ethical clarity and interior stability.

This architecture begins with **Kaal**, which confronts the human being with the reality of impermanence and mortality. In the context of leadership formation, Kaal performs an ontological diagnostic function. It destabilizes the illusion of permanence that often underlies authority, institutional status, and social prestige. By reminding the individual that all worldly structures are transient, Kaal exposes the fragility of identities constructed around power, reputation, and institutional control. This awareness introduces humility and disrupts the psychological security that leaders frequently derive from their positions.

The second movement of the architecture addresses **Māyā**, which reveals the distortions that arise from attachment, ego, and the pursuit of recognition. If Kaal exposes the external instability of the world, Māyā uncovers the internal mechanisms through which individuals misinterpret reality. Illusion manifests through attachment to status, intellectual pride, symbolic success, and institutional validation. In leadership contexts, such distortions can lead to ethically compromised decision-making, where appearances, alliances, or reputational concerns overshadow principled judgment. The Māyā lens therefore functions as a critical clarification stage, helping leaders recognize how ethical perception becomes clouded by personal and institutional attachments.

The third movement introduces **Bibek (discernment) and Vairāg (detachment)** as the ethical capacities required to navigate a world marked by impermanence and illusion. At this stage, the pedagogical emphasis shifts from diagnosis to formation. Discernment enables individuals to distinguish truth from illusion and principle from convenience, while detachment frees them from compulsive attachment to outcomes, recognition, or validation. Together, Bibek and Vairāg cultivate moral independence, allowing leaders to act with clarity and steadiness even within environments shaped by competition, pressure, and institutional complexity. These capacities transform ethical awareness into disciplined ethical agency.

The architecture culminates in **Naam**, which functions as the ontological grounding of ethical life. Whereas the preceding stages expose fragility, reveal illusion, and cultivate discernment, Naam provides the interior anchoring that stabilizes ethical action over time. Through remembrance of the Divine, the individual's identity is no longer defined primarily by role, prestige, or institutional success. Ethical action becomes internally grounded rather than externally driven. Leadership, in this sense, is no longer sustained by recognition or authority alone but by a deeper alignment between conscience, action, and the Divine orientation of life.

Thus, the four movements together constitute a coherent ethical progression:
Kaal → Māyā → Bibek/Vairāg → Naam
Ontological Diagnosis → Ethical Clarification → Moral Formation → Moral Freedom

This progression demonstrates that ethical leadership cannot emerge solely from institutional procedures or regulatory frameworks. Instead, it arises from the gradual formation of the

leader's interior orientation. When impermanence is acknowledged, illusion recognized, discernment cultivated, and identity anchored beyond ego and prestige, leadership becomes capable of exercising moral freedom within complex institutional environments.

Figure 1 illustrates this ethical architecture as an integrated pedagogical structure. The four themes are represented as interconnected layers, each performing a specific function within the formation process. The diagram visually emphasizes that ethical leadership is not the result of isolated competencies but of a sequential transformation in how individuals understand themselves, their responsibilities, and the nature of authority.

By presenting this architecture, the chapter establishes the conceptual framework for the sections that follow. Each of the four lenses—Kaal, Māyā, Bibek/Vairāg, and Naam—will be examined as a distinct yet interconnected dimension of leadership formation in Higher Education Institutions. Through this lens-based approach, the ethical pedagogy of *Salok Mahalla 9* is translated into a formation model capable of informing contemporary leadership education while remaining faithful to its original philosophical and spiritual insights.

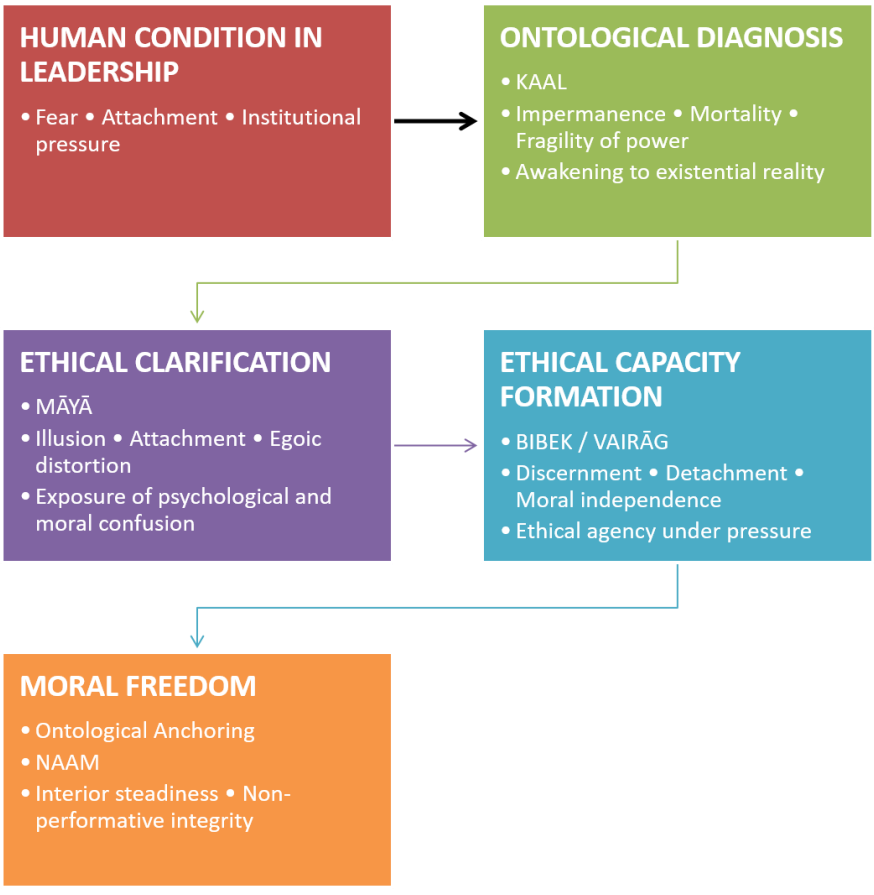


Figure 1: The Ethical Architecture of *Salok Mahalla 9*: From Ontological Diagnosis to Moral Freedom

8.2 Leadership Relevance for Higher Education Institutions

The ethical architecture outlined in the preceding section acquires particular significance when considered in relation to leadership formation within contemporary Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Universities today operate within environments characterized by institutional complexity, competing expectations, reputational pressures, and rapidly shifting social demands. Leadership within such institutions is required to balance academic freedom, administrative accountability, financial sustainability, and public trust. While these responsibilities are often addressed through governance structures, compliance frameworks, and professional development programs, the ethical challenges that arise in academic leadership frequently extend beyond procedural or managerial solutions.

Modern leadership development initiatives in higher education commonly emphasize competencies such as strategic planning, policy literacy, organizational communication, crisis management, and regulatory compliance. These skills are necessary for the effective administration of complex institutions. However, they often assume that leaders already possess the ethical clarity and moral independence required to apply these competencies responsibly. In practice, this assumption does not always hold. Institutional failures in governance, erosion of academic trust, and ethically compromised decision-making frequently reveal a deeper problem: leadership formation has focused on managerial capability while neglecting the interior ethical orientation of those entrusted with authority.

Higher Education Institutions are particularly vulnerable to such ethical distortions because their structures simultaneously embody intellectual authority, symbolic prestige, and institutional competition. Academic leadership operates within systems that reward recognition, productivity metrics, institutional rankings, and professional reputation. While these elements can stimulate excellence, they can also generate subtle pressures that distort ethical judgment. Leaders may become attached to institutional prestige, anxious about reputational risk, or influenced by networks of patronage and institutional loyalty. Under such conditions, decision-making can shift from principled deliberation to strategic self-preservation, producing what may appear externally as administrative decisions but which internally reflect unresolved ethical tensions.

The ethical pedagogy embedded in *Salok Mahalla 9* offers a distinctive framework for addressing this challenge because it approaches leadership formation at the level of existential orientation rather than merely organizational technique. The four thematic lenses—Kaal, Māyā, Bibek/Vairāg, and Naam—collectively illuminate the deeper dynamics that shape human action within positions of authority.

Theme	Function in Leadership Formation
Kaal	Destabilizes false security
Māyā	Exposes distortion
Bibek/Vairāg	Forms ethical discernment
Naam	Anchors and liberates

The **Kaal lens**, by emphasizing impermanence, challenges the illusion of permanence that often surrounds institutional authority. For leaders in HEIs, this awareness introduces humility and ethical sobriety. When authority is understood as transient rather than absolute, leadership becomes less invested in personal prestige and more oriented toward stewardship of institutional mission.

The **Māyā lens** addresses the distortions produced by attachment to recognition, reputation, and symbolic success. In academic environments where evaluation systems, rankings, and professional visibility strongly influence institutional culture, the ability to distinguish between appearance and ethical substance becomes particularly important. The Māyā perspective encourages leaders to examine how institutional narratives of success may obscure deeper ethical responsibilities.

The **Bibek/Vairāg lens** moves beyond diagnosis toward the cultivation of ethical capacity. Discernment enables leaders to recognize the moral dimensions of complex institutional decisions, while detachment stabilizes action by reducing dependence on validation, approval, or outcome-based success. Together, these capacities strengthen ethical independence and allow leaders to navigate institutional pressures without compromising core principles.

Finally, the **Naam lens** introduces the dimension of ontological anchoring. Leadership responsibilities often generate emotional strain, isolation, and moral fatigue. Without an interior grounding that transcends institutional role identity, leaders may become reactive, defensive, or ethically exhausted. Naam, understood as the anchoring of identity in a deeper moral orientation beyond ego and institutional validation, provides the interior steadiness that sustains ethical action over time.

Taken together, these lenses suggest that ethical leadership in Higher Education Institutions cannot be fully cultivated through structural reforms alone. Policies, governance mechanisms, and accountability procedures remain essential for institutional functioning, but they cannot substitute for the interior formation of the leader. Ethical governance ultimately depends upon the character, perception, and moral independence of those who exercise authority.

Within this perspective, leadership formation becomes an anthropological and ethical process rather than merely a managerial one. Universities do not become ethically stable solely through regulatory compliance; they become stable when leaders possess the clarity, humility, and moral steadiness necessary to exercise authority responsibly. Institutional integrity therefore

emerges not only from policy frameworks but from the interior orientation of those entrusted with leadership.

The relevance of the ethical architecture of *Salok Mahalla 9* for Higher Education Institutions lies precisely in this emphasis on formation. By addressing impermanence, illusion, discernment, and ontological anchoring, the framework offers a pathway through which leadership may move from existential awareness toward morally grounded institutional stewardship. In this way, the ethical pedagogy of the text provides a conceptual bridge between spiritual anthropology and contemporary leadership studies, demonstrating how insights rooted in Gurmat thought may inform ethical leadership formation within pluralistic academic environments.

The subsequent sections of this chapter build upon this relevance by examining each thematic lens independently and translating its ethical insights into practical frameworks for leadership development in Higher Education Institutions. Through this analysis, the chapter seeks to show that the progression from Kaal to Naam does not remain confined to spiritual reflection but can serve as a coherent model for cultivating leadership capable of sustaining institutional integrity in complex and demanding educational contexts.

8.3. The Kaal Lens: Impermanence as Ethical Awakening in Leadership Formation

1 The Need for the Kaal Lens in Leadership Formation

Leadership formation in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) is often framed in terms of competence, strategy, and institutional management. Leaders are trained to manage budgets, oversee governance structures, navigate regulatory frameworks, and sustain institutional competitiveness. While these competencies are necessary, they frequently presuppose an ethical stability that leadership education itself does not explicitly cultivate. As a result, leaders may possess administrative proficiency yet remain vulnerable to fear, ego, reputational anxiety, and attachment to institutional authority.

The ethical insight represented by **Kaal**, understood as the principle of impermanence, addresses this deeper dimension of leadership formation. Within the pedagogical structure of *Salok Mahalla 9,* Kaal functions as an existential awakening. It confronts the human being with the inevitability of mortality and the transience of worldly structures. Positions of power, institutional reputation, social recognition, and intellectual prestige—all of which often shape leadership identity—are revealed as temporary and fragile.

In the context of leadership formation, this awareness performs a critical diagnostic role. Many distortions in institutional leadership arise from the illusion of permanence. Authority becomes conflated with personal identity, institutional success becomes tied to personal reputation, and leadership decisions become governed by the fear of loss. When leaders unconsciously treat

their roles as extensions of their personal worth or legacy, ethical judgment becomes compromised. Decisions may then prioritize institutional appearance, personal influence, or reputational security over principled responsibility.

The Kaal lens disrupts this illusion by introducing existential clarity. By recognizing the impermanence of authority, position, and recognition, leaders are invited to reconsider the foundations upon which their actions rest. Authority becomes a temporary trust rather than a permanent entitlement. Institutional roles become responsibilities rather than identities. This shift does not weaken leadership; rather, it frees leaders from the anxiety of self-preservation and allows them to exercise authority with humility and moral independence.

In this sense, the Kaal lens does not merely offer a philosophical reflection on mortality. It functions as a pedagogical mechanism that destabilizes ego-centered leadership and prepares the ground for ethical transformation. Before discernment and detachment can be cultivated, the leader must first confront the fragility of the structures that sustain ego, prestige, and control. Impermanence therefore serves as the first movement in the ethical architecture of leadership formation.

Within contemporary HEIs, where leadership positions are embedded within competitive systems of recognition, evaluation, and performance metrics, such existential awareness becomes particularly important. Leaders are often evaluated through institutional rankings, research output, funding acquisition, and reputational visibility. While these measures can encourage excellence, they can also create subtle incentives for decision-making driven by prestige preservation rather than ethical clarity. The Kaal perspective interrupts this orientation by reminding leaders that institutional reputation and personal achievement remain historically contingent and transient.

Thus, the need for the Kaal lens in leadership formation arises from its capacity to cultivate ethical sobriety. It dismantles the illusion that authority guarantees permanence and exposes the deeper vulnerability of human institutions. In doing so, it prepares the leader to approach responsibility with humility, seriousness, and a heightened awareness of moral accountability.

2 Core Capacities Cultivated through the Kaal Lens

When translated into leadership formation, the insight of impermanence cultivates several interrelated ethical capacities. These capacities collectively shape a form of leadership that is grounded not in personal authority but in ethical awareness and responsible stewardship.

1. Death as Ethical Equalizer

Recognition of mortality equalizes all human beings regardless of status, authority, or intellectual achievement. For leaders in academic institutions, this awareness counters the subtle hierarchies that often accompany seniority and professional recognition. It reminds leaders that authority does not elevate them beyond the ethical responsibilities

shared by all individuals. Such awareness encourages humility and discourages arrogance in positions of influence.

2. Detachment from Role and Identity

Academic leadership positions often become deeply intertwined with personal identity. Professorships, administrative titles, and institutional recognition can gradually shape how individuals understand themselves. The Kaal lens invites leaders to recognize the temporary nature of such roles. When identity is no longer defined by position, leaders become capable of exercising authority without clinging to it as a source of personal validation.

3. Ethical Independence from Relationships

Institutional decision-making frequently occurs within networks of professional relationships, collegial alliances, and informal loyalties. While relationships are essential for collaboration, they can also influence judgment. Awareness of impermanence encourages leaders to maintain ethical independence from relational pressures. Decisions are then guided by principle rather than by the desire to preserve alliances or avoid interpersonal discomfort.

4. Ego, Prestige, and Scholarly Humility

Academic environments often reward intellectual achievement and professional distinction. While such recognition reflects genuine accomplishment, it can also cultivate subtle forms of intellectual pride. The Kaal lens reminds leaders that scholarly reputation, like all human achievements, remains transient. This awareness fosters scholarly humility and encourages leaders to value truth and integrity above personal acclaim.

5. Impermanence as Moral Urgency

Recognition of the limited nature of human life introduces a sense of moral urgency. Leadership decisions cannot be indefinitely postponed or avoided. Ethical responsibilities must be addressed in the present rather than deferred to future circumstances. Impermanence therefore motivates leaders to act responsibly and decisively when confronted with ethical challenges.

6. Preparation and Ethical Readiness

The awareness of impermanence also encourages ethical preparedness. Leaders recognize that crises, institutional challenges, and moral dilemmas can arise unexpectedly. Rather than reacting impulsively, they cultivate a reflective disposition that prepares them to respond thoughtfully when such situations emerge.

7. Orientation toward Inner Anchoring

Although the Kaal lens focuses primarily on impermanence, it simultaneously gestures toward the need for a deeper anchoring of the self. When worldly structures are recognized as transient, the question naturally arises: what remains stable? This inquiry

prepares the ground for the later introduction of Naam as the ultimate source of ethical steadiness.

These seven dimensions collectively illustrate how the insight of impermanence moves beyond philosophical reflection to become a practical framework for ethical leadership formation.

3 The Kaal-Informed Leadership Formation Model

When the capacities described above are integrated, they form a leadership formation model grounded in existential awareness. This model suggests that ethical leadership begins not with institutional technique but with an inward recognition of the fragility of human authority.

The process may be understood as a gradual progression. Awareness of impermanence first destabilizes the illusion of permanence surrounding institutional authority. This destabilization introduces humility and reduces the ego-centered motivations that often distort leadership behaviour. As humility develops, leaders become more capable of exercising ethical independence from personal interests, reputational anxieties, and relational pressures.

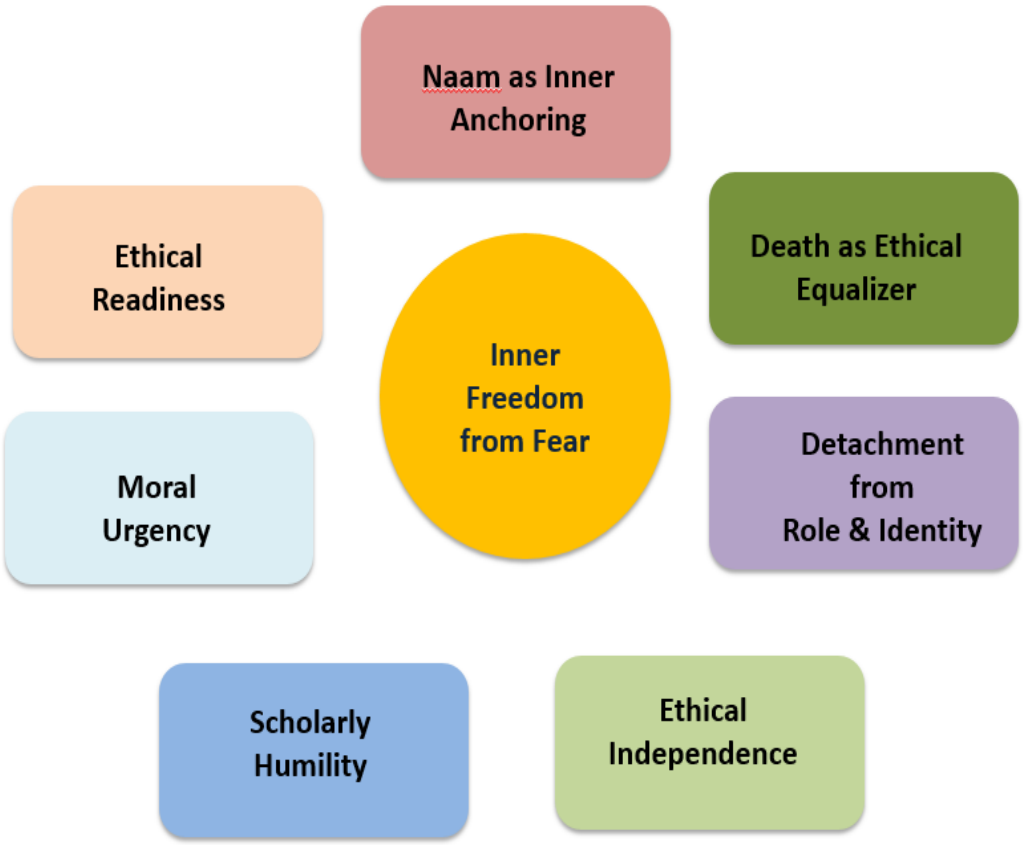


Figure 2 Seven interrelated components of ethical leadership formation grounded in impermanence.

Integrative Insight: Ethical leadership emerges not from compliance mechanisms but from existential formation; institutions become ethical when leaders become inwardly free.

The outcome of this progression is a form of leadership characterized by moral seriousness and reflective judgment. Leaders no longer treat institutional authority as an extension of personal identity but as a temporary trust entrusted to them for the benefit of the academic community. Ethical decision-making thus becomes grounded in responsibility rather than in self-preservation.

4 Implications for Leadership Training Programs in HEIs

Translating the Kaal lens into leadership education requires the incorporation of reflective and formative practices within leadership development programs. Traditional leadership training in HEIs tends to focus on procedural knowledge and technical competence. A Kaal-informed framework complements these competencies by cultivating existential awareness and ethical seriousness.

Possible training components include reflective exercises that invite leaders to examine the temporary nature of institutional authority, discussions on the ethical responsibilities associated with positions of influence, and case-based reflections that explore how fear of loss or reputational anxiety may shape decision-making. Such activities encourage leaders to develop a deeper understanding of how impermanence influences both personal motivation and institutional culture.

The aim of these practices is not to diminish the significance of leadership roles but to situate them within a broader ethical horizon. Leaders who recognize the transient nature of their authority are more likely to approach governance with humility, accountability, and a commitment to the long-term well-being of the institution.

5 Integrative Contribution of the Kaal Lens

Within the broader ethical architecture of leadership formation, the Kaal lens performs a foundational role. It awakens the leader to the existential conditions of human life and exposes the fragility of institutional authority. This awakening creates the psychological and ethical space necessary for deeper transformation. Without such awareness, leadership formation risks remaining superficial. Administrative skills may be developed, but the deeper motivations that shape ethical behavior remain unexamined. Kaal therefore functions as the initial movement of ethical pedagogy, preparing the leader to confront illusion, cultivate discernment, and ultimately seek ontological anchoring.

6 Scope and Limits of the Kaal Lens

While the Kaal lens provides an essential foundation for ethical awakening, it does not by itself produce complete ethical formation. Awareness of impermanence can generate humility and

moral seriousness, but it does not necessarily eliminate the distortions created by attachment and ego. Leaders may recognize the transient nature of authority yet still remain influenced by prestige, recognition, or institutional competition.

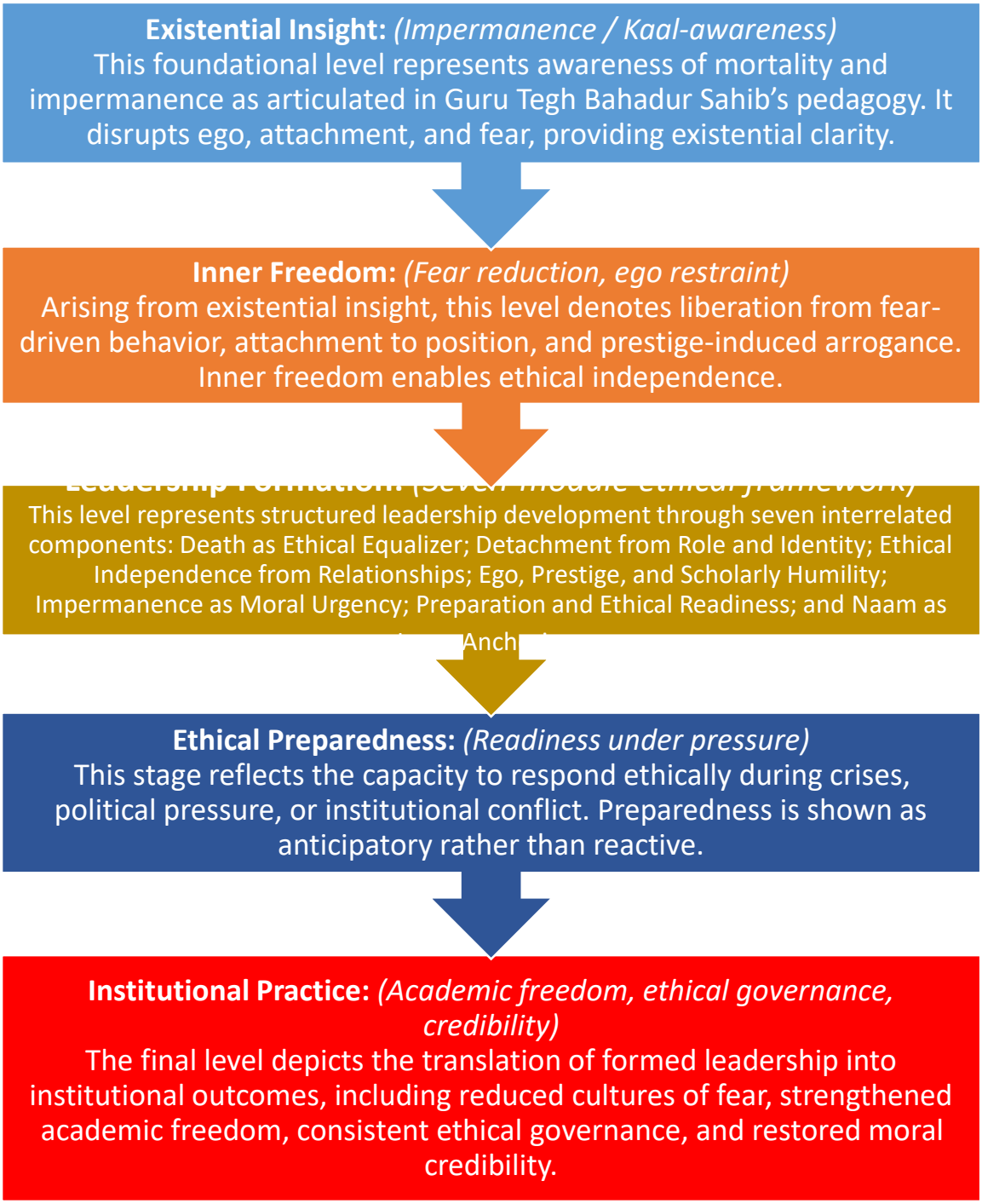


Figure 3 Ethical Leadership as a Process of Inner Formation Leading to Institutional Integrity

For this reason, the pedagogical progression continues with the examination of **Māyā**, which exposes the psychological and social mechanisms through which illusion operates. The Kaal lens therefore represents the beginning of ethical awakening rather than its culmination. It

prepares the leader to confront the deeper distortions that shape human perception and institutional life.

8.4. The Māyā Lens: Ethical Clarity in Institutional Life

1 The Need for the Māyā Lens in Leadership Formation

If the Kaal lens awakens leaders to the impermanence of worldly authority, the **Māyā lens** addresses a different but equally significant dimension of ethical life: the distortions produced by attachment, ego, and misperception. Within the ethical architecture of *Salok Mahalla 9*, Māyā does not merely signify material wealth or worldly involvement. Rather, it refers to the condition in which individuals mistake appearance for reality, attach their identity to transient achievements, and allow ego-driven desires to shape their judgment. Māyā thus functions as a conceptual framework for understanding how ethical clarity becomes obscured within human experience.

In institutional settings such as Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), the dynamics associated with Māyā are particularly visible. Universities operate within environments that simultaneously encourage intellectual inquiry and reward symbolic markers of success. Academic reputation, publication metrics, institutional rankings, administrative authority, and professional recognition often serve as indicators of achievement. While these indicators can promote excellence, they can also create subtle incentives that distort ethical judgment.

For leaders in HEIs, such distortions frequently appear in the form of **prestige culture**, **competitive institutional narratives**, and **performance-driven evaluation systems**. Leaders may begin to equate institutional success with numerical indicators such as rankings, funding acquisition, or visibility in global academic networks. In such contexts, decisions that protect the appearance of institutional success may be prioritized over those that safeguard deeper ethical commitments such as academic freedom, intellectual integrity, or equitable governance. The Māyā lens provides a framework for recognizing these distortions. Whereas the Kaal lens confronts the leader with existential impermanence, the Māyā lens exposes the **psychological and social mechanisms that sustain illusion**. Leaders may intellectually acknowledge the impermanence of their roles yet still remain influenced by the desire for recognition, validation, or control. Māyā reveals how such attachments shape perception, often without the individual's conscious awareness.

This insight is particularly relevant for academic leadership because universities frequently operate within symbolic economies of prestige. Institutional identity may become intertwined with external validation from ranking agencies, funding bodies, or professional networks. Leaders who internalize these external markers as the primary measure of success may unintentionally reinforce cultures in which ethical considerations are subordinated to reputational preservation.

The Māyā lens therefore functions as an instrument of **ethical clarification**. It encourages leaders to examine how institutional narratives, social expectations, and personal ambitions influence their perception of reality. By identifying these influences, leaders develop the capacity to distinguish between **appearance and substance**, **recognition and integrity**, and **institutional success and ethical legitimacy**.

Within the broader pedagogical progression of *Salok Mahalla 9,* this stage represents the movement from existential awareness to moral perception. Kaal reveals the fragility of worldly structures; Māyā reveals how attachment to those structures distorts human judgment. Only when illusion is recognized can ethical discernment begin to emerge.

2 Core Capacities Cultivated through the Māyā Lens

When translated into leadership formation, the Māyā lens cultivates a set of ethical capacities that enable leaders to perceive institutional reality more clearly and resist the distortions generated by attachment and prestige. These capacities form the foundation for ethically responsible governance.

1. Awareness of Ethical Distortion
The first capacity involves recognizing how illusion operates within institutional life. Leaders learn to identify the subtle ways in which prestige, competition, and symbolic success influence decision-making. Such awareness allows them to question assumptions that may otherwise remain unquestioned, particularly those related to institutional reputation or performance metrics.

2. Discernment between Appearance and Substance
Academic institutions often engage in symbolic practices designed to demonstrate ethical commitment or institutional excellence. While such practices may have value, they can also become performative. The Māyā lens trains leaders to distinguish between genuine ethical integrity and symbolic displays that merely create the appearance of responsibility.

3. Detachment from Role, Rank, and Recognition
Leadership positions in HEIs frequently confer prestige and influence. The Māyā lens encourages leaders to exercise authority without becoming attached to the recognition associated with it. When leaders detach their identity from institutional titles or public acclaim, they become more capable of making decisions based on principle rather than personal validation.

4. Ethical Independence from Networks of Patronage
Institutional decision-making often occurs within complex networks of professional alliances, collaborations, and personal relationships. While such networks are essential for institutional functioning, they can also influence judgment. The Māyā lens

cultivates ethical independence, enabling leaders to act responsibly even when decisions challenge established relationships or expectations.

5. Humility in Scholarly Authority
Academic leadership frequently rests upon intellectual achievement and professional distinction. While these accomplishments deserve recognition, they can also generate moral blind spots. Awareness of Māyā encourages leaders to maintain humility regarding their own knowledge and authority, recognizing that intellectual excellence does not exempt individuals from ethical accountability.

6. Stability in Environments of Competition
Universities operate within increasingly competitive environments characterized by global rankings, funding competition, and public scrutiny. The Māyā lens helps leaders maintain inner stability amid such pressures. Rather than becoming driven by institutional comparison or reputational anxiety, leaders learn to prioritize long-term ethical coherence.

7. Orientation toward Inner Ethical Clarity
Finally, recognition of illusion naturally directs the leader toward the search for deeper clarity. When the distortions of prestige, recognition, and symbolic success are exposed, the need for reliable ethical discernment becomes evident. In this way, the Māyā lens prepares the ground for the cultivation of **Bibek (discernment)** and **Vairāg (detachment)** in the subsequent stage of the ethical architecture.

3 The Māyā-Informed Leadership Formation Model

The leadership formation model suggested by the Māyā lens may be understood as a process through which leaders gradually learn to perceive institutional reality with increasing clarity. This process begins with the recognition that institutional life is shaped not only by formal structures but also by narratives, symbols, and cultural expectations that influence perception.

The first stage of the model involves identifying how institutional success is defined and communicated within the organization. Leaders reflect on how indicators such as rankings, visibility, and reputation shape the institutional imagination. By examining these narratives critically, leaders begin to recognize the difference between external validation and internal ethical integrity.

The second stage involves cultivating detachment from these narratives. Leaders learn to evaluate institutional decisions not solely through the lens of prestige or performance but through the deeper criteria of fairness, intellectual honesty, and academic responsibility. This detachment does not require withdrawal from institutional life; rather, it enables leaders to participate in it without being dominated by its symbolic pressures.

The final stage involves the emergence of ethical independence. Leaders who have recognized and detached from illusion become capable of making decisions grounded in principle rather than institutional appearance. Governance then becomes an expression of ethical clarity rather than a negotiation of reputational concerns.

Through this model, the Māyā lens transforms leadership from a role defined by institutional prestige into a practice grounded in ethical perception.

4 Implications for Leadership Training Programs in HEIs

Incorporating the Māyā lens into leadership development programs requires creating opportunities for leaders to critically examine the cultural dynamics that shape institutional life. Training programs may include reflective exercises that explore how prestige and recognition influence leadership identity, as well as case studies that highlight ethical dilemmas arising from institutional competition or reputational concerns.

Workshops may also invite leaders to analyse how symbolic commitments to values such as diversity, academic freedom, or institutional integrity are translated into actual governance practices. By examining the gap between declared values and lived reality, leaders develop a deeper awareness of how performative ethics can emerge within complex organizations.

Such training does not aim to reject institutional excellence or public recognition. Rather, it seeks to ensure that these goals remain aligned with ethical responsibility. Leaders formed through the Māyā lens become capable of pursuing institutional success without sacrificing moral integrity.

5 Integrative Contribution of the Māyā Lens

Within the broader ethical architecture of leadership formation, the Māyā lens contributes the crucial dimension of **perceptual clarity**. While Kaal awakens the leader to the impermanence of authority, Māyā reveals how attachment to prestige and recognition distorts ethical judgment.

By exposing these distortions, the Māyā lens prepares the leader to cultivate disciplined ethical discernment. It shifts the focus of leadership formation from external achievements to the internal processes through which individuals interpret reality. Ethical governance thus becomes grounded in clarity of perception rather than merely in institutional regulation.

6 Scope and Limits of the Māyā Lens

Despite its importance, the Māyā lens does not complete the process of ethical formation. Recognizing illusion does not automatically provide the capacity to act ethically in complex situations. Leaders may perceive the distortions generated by prestige and recognition yet still struggle to resist them in practice.

For this reason, the ethical pedagogy of *Salok Mahalla 9* proceeds to the cultivation of **Bibek (discernment)** and **Vairāg (detachment)**. These capacities transform ethical awareness into disciplined action. Where the Māyā lens clarifies perception, the Bibek/Vairāg lens develops the moral strength necessary to act upon that clarity.

The next section therefore examines how discernment and detachment function as the interior capacities through which ethical leadership becomes stable and sustainable within Higher Education Institutions.

8.5. The Bibek/Vairāg Lens: Ethical Capacity Formation

1 The Need for the Bibek/Vairāg Lens in Leadership Formation

The preceding lenses of **Kaal** and **Māyā** establish the diagnostic foundations of ethical leadership formation. Kaal awakens the leader to the impermanence of worldly authority, while Māyā exposes the distortions produced by attachment, prestige, and ego. Together, these lenses cultivate existential awareness and perceptual clarity. Yet awareness alone does not guarantee ethical action. Leaders may recognize impermanence and even perceive institutional illusions, but without disciplined ethical capacities they may still struggle to act in accordance with their insight.

This gap between **ethical awareness and ethical action** marks the need for the **Bibek/Vairāg lens**. Within the ethical pedagogy of *Salok Mahalla 9*, Bibek (discernment) and Vairāg (detachment) represent the interior capacities through which ethical clarity becomes operational. They transform moral perception into principled decision-making and stabilize leadership conduct in environments characterized by uncertainty, competition, and institutional pressure.

Bibek, commonly translated as discernment or moral insight, refers to the capacity to distinguish truth from illusion, principle from convenience, and long-term responsibility from short-term advantage. In leadership contexts, Bibek enables individuals to recognize the ethical dimensions of institutional decisions. It sharpens moral perception, allowing leaders to evaluate policies, practices, and institutional narratives not merely through administrative criteria but through ethical reasoning.

However, discernment alone is insufficient if leaders remain emotionally attached to outcomes, recognition, or institutional approval. This is where **Vairāg**, understood as disciplined detachment, becomes essential. Vairāg does not imply withdrawal from institutional responsibility; rather, it refers to freedom from compulsive attachment to personal gain, reputation, or validation. When leaders cultivate detachment from the rewards and anxieties associated with authority, they become capable of acting upon their discernment with steadiness and independence.

Together, Bibek and Vairāg form an integrated ethical capacity. Discernment corrects perception, while detachment stabilizes action. Without Bibek, leaders may fail to recognize ethical implications; without Vairāg, they may recognize those implications but lack the courage to act upon them. The union of these capacities therefore represents a decisive stage in leadership formation, where ethical awareness is transformed into moral agency.

In the context of Higher Education Institutions, this lens is particularly significant. Academic leaders frequently operate within environments marked by complex governance structures, political negotiation, and reputational competition. Decisions may involve balancing institutional interests with academic freedom, navigating conflicts among stakeholders, or responding to crises that attract public scrutiny. In such situations, administrative competence alone cannot ensure ethical integrity. Leaders require the ability to perceive ethical implications clearly and the inner independence to act according to principle despite institutional pressures. The Bibek/Vairāg lens therefore shifts the focus of leadership development from **diagnosis to formation**. It recognizes that ethical governance depends upon leaders who possess disciplined moral capacities rather than merely technical skills. By cultivating discernment and detachment, leadership formation becomes a process of strengthening the interior resources necessary for principled action.

2 Core Capacities Cultivated through the Bibek/Vairāg Lens

When translated into leadership formation, the Bibek/Vairāg lens cultivates a series of interrelated ethical capacities that enable leaders to exercise responsible authority within complex institutional environments.

1. Moral Perception and Ethical Self-Awareness
Discernment begins with the ability to recognize how personal biases, institutional narratives, and emotional reactions influence decision-making. Leaders develop awareness of the ethical dimensions embedded within administrative choices and learn to reflect critically on their own motivations.

2. Distinguishing Principle from Convenience
Institutional decisions often involve tensions between expediency and ethical responsibility. Bibek enables leaders to evaluate options beyond immediate institutional advantage and to recognize when convenience conflicts with deeper moral commitments.

3. Detachment from Prestige and Validation
Academic leadership positions often carry symbolic prestige and social recognition. Vairāg cultivates the capacity to exercise authority without becoming dependent on such validation. Leaders become capable of making decisions that may not enhance personal reputation but remain ethically necessary.

4. Emotional Regulation in Decision-Making

Institutional crises, public criticism, or internal conflict can provoke reactive decision-making. Detachment stabilizes emotional responses, enabling leaders to maintain composure and act thoughtfully rather than impulsively.

5. Moral Courage under Institutional Pressure
Ethical leadership frequently requires making decisions that challenge established expectations or powerful interests. The integration of discernment and detachment fosters the courage to uphold principle even when doing so carries personal or professional risk.

6. Independence from Outcome-Based Anxiety
Leaders often experience anxiety regarding the consequences of their decisions, particularly when outcomes may affect institutional reputation or personal standing. Vairāg reduces this anxiety by emphasizing commitment to ethical responsibility rather than attachment to specific results.

7. Ethical Consistency in Governance
When discernment and detachment operate together, leadership behavior becomes more consistent. Decisions are guided by stable principles rather than by shifting institutional pressures or personal preferences.
These capacities collectively illustrate how the Bibek/Vairāg lens transforms ethical awareness into disciplined ethical agency.

3 The Bibek/Vairāg Leadership Formation Model

The leadership formation model associated with the Bibek/Vairāg lens conceptualizes ethical leadership as a progression from inner moral formation to institutional integrity. The process begins with the cultivation of discernment, through which leaders learn to recognize ethical complexity within institutional life. As moral perception deepens, leaders begin to evaluate decisions according to principles of fairness, intellectual honesty, and long-term institutional responsibility.

The next stage involves the cultivation of detachment. Leaders examine the attachments that may influence their decisions—whether related to reputation, authority, or personal relationships—and gradually develop the ability to act without being governed by these influences. Detachment thus stabilizes discernment by removing the emotional dependencies that often undermine ethical judgment.

When discernment and detachment operate together, leadership behaviour becomes anchored in moral independence. Leaders are able to navigate institutional complexity while remaining faithful to ethical principles. Governance decisions reflect clarity of judgment and freedom from ego-driven motivations.

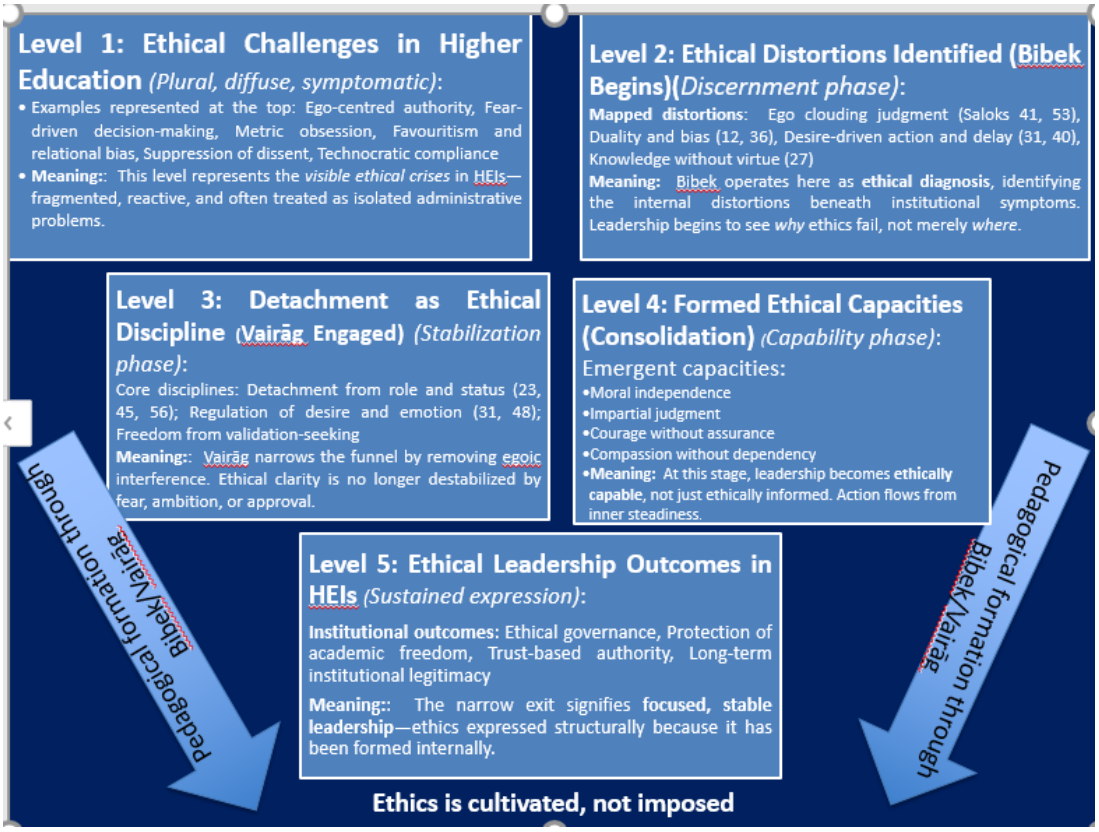


Figure 3 Pedagogical funnel illustrating Bibek and Vairāg as ethical capacity formation in higher education leadership.

4 Leadership Training Module: A Bibek/Vairāg-Informed Framework

The ethical capacities described above may be cultivated through a structured leadership formation module designed for Higher Education Institutions. Such a module emphasizes reflective practice, ethical reasoning, and experiential learning rather than purely technical instruction.

The formation process may be organized around four interrelated components.

Component 1: Ethical Self-Awareness and Discernment
This component focuses on cultivating the ability to recognize ethical dimensions in institutional decision-making. Through case-based discussions and reflective exercises, leaders learn to identify biases, assumptions, and institutional pressures that shape their perceptions.

Component 2: Detachment from Role and Outcome
Leaders examine how attachment to position, recognition, or institutional success influences their behaviour. Reflective practices encourage participants to consider authority as stewardship rather than personal possession.

Component 3: Emotional Regulation and Ethical Steadiness
Training activities emphasize the importance of composure during moments of institutional tension or crisis. Simulations and guided reflection help leaders develop the ability to align action with discernment even under pressure.

Component 4: Institutional Application and Ethical Governance
The final component translates inner formation into governance practices. Leaders apply ethical reasoning to policy development, decision-making processes, and institutional culture, ensuring that ethical clarity is reflected in organizational structures.

Through this framework, leadership formation becomes a disciplined process of strengthening ethical capacity rather than merely enhancing administrative proficiency.

Layer	Role	Correctness
Layer 1: Bibek	Moral perception & self-awareness	✓ Foundational
Layer 2: Vairāg	Emotional and ethical stability	✓ Necessary mediator
Layer 3: Capacities	Actionable leadership virtues	✓ Translation layer
Layer 4: Institutions	Social manifestation of ethics	✓ Consequence, not cause

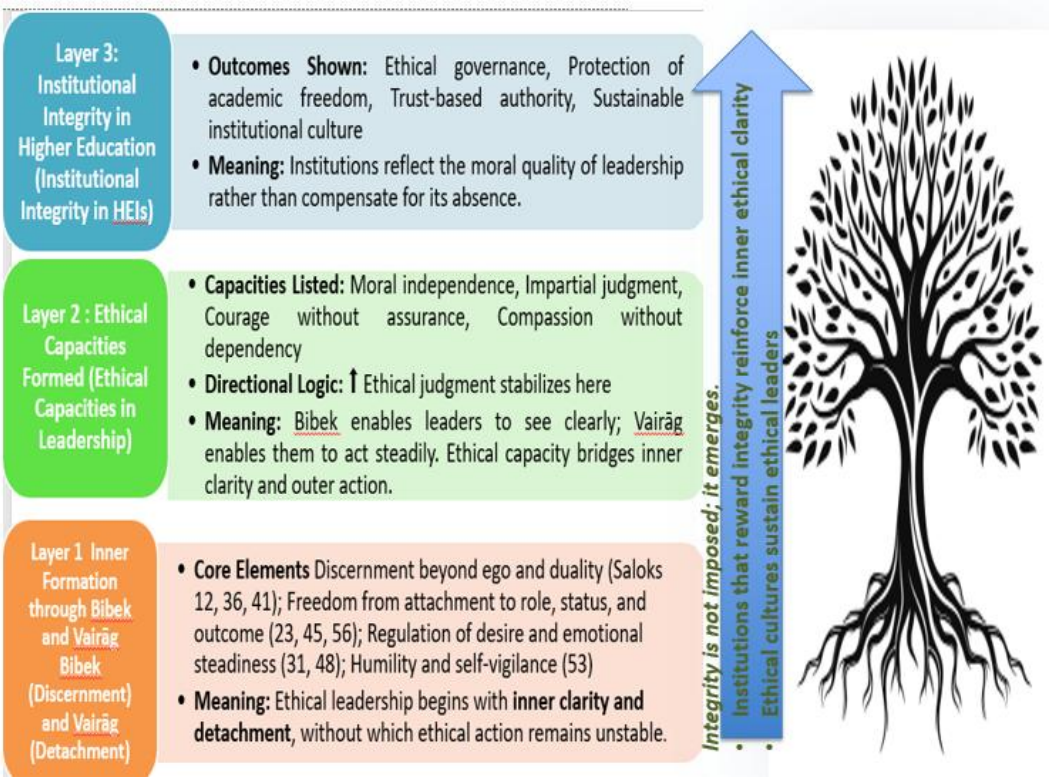
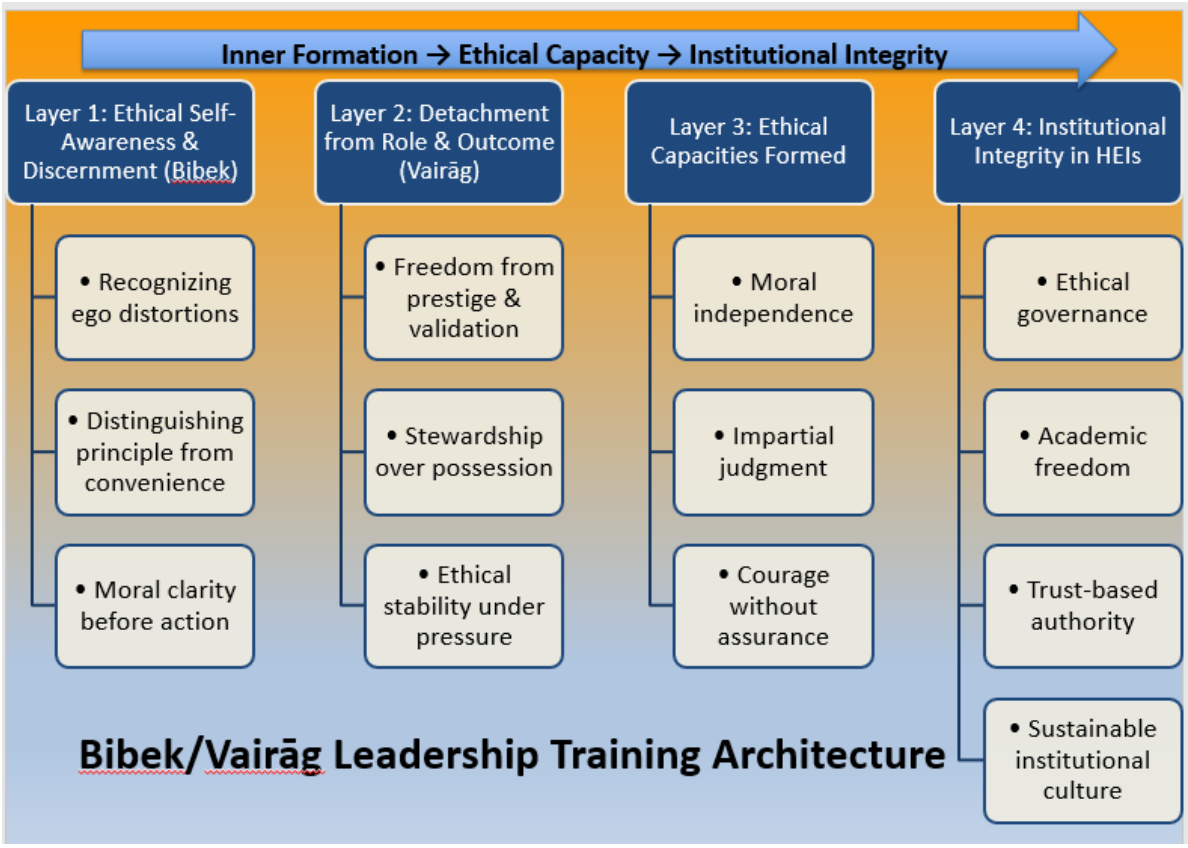


Figure 4 Ethical leadership as a process of inner formation leading to institutional integrity in the context of Bibek and Vairāg.

Layer 1 (Bibek) establishes ethical self-awareness. Leaders learn to recognize ego-driven distortions and distinguish principle from convenience, correcting perception before action.
Layer 2 (Vairāg) develops disciplined detachment. Freedom from prestige, validation, and outcome anxiety stabilizes judgment under pressure.
Layer 3 translates inner clarity into ethical capacities such as moral independence, impartial judgment, and courage without assurance—bridging inward formation with outward responsibility.
Layer 4 represents institutional integrity—ethical governance, academic freedom, trust, and sustainability—as the natural expression of morally formed leadership.

The following figure presents leadership formation in Higher Education Institutions as an integrated ethical progression grounded in Bibek (discernment) and Vairāg (detachment). It moves from inner moral formation to institutional integrity, emphasizing that ethical governance emerges from cultivated clarity rather than imposed compliance. The model illustrates a clear pedagogical flow: **Inner Formation → Ethical Capacity → Institutional Integrity**, affirming that institutional health rests on prior ethical cultivation rather than structural enforcement.



"Integrity is not enforced but emerges from ethically formed leadership."

Figure 5. Bibek/Vairāg Leadership Training Architecture: From Inner Formation to Institutional Integrity

5 Integrative Contribution of the Bibek/Vairāg Lens

Within the broader ethical architecture of leadership formation, the Bibek/Vairāg lens performs the crucial function of **ethical capacity formation**. While Kaal awakens existential awareness and Māyā clarifies perception, Bibek and Vairāg provide the inner discipline necessary for ethical action.

Their contribution lies in transforming leadership from a reactive exercise of authority into a principled practice grounded in moral independence. Leaders formed through this lens are capable of navigating institutional complexity without becoming captive to its pressures. Ethical governance emerges not from external enforcement but from the interior strength of the leader.

6 Scope and Limits of the Bibek/Vairāg Lens

Although the cultivation of discernment and detachment significantly strengthens ethical leadership, it does not entirely resolve the deeper question of moral grounding. Leaders may develop strong ethical capacities yet still experience instability if their sense of identity remains tied primarily to institutional roles or personal achievement.

For this reason, the ethical pedagogy of *Salok Mahalla 9* culminates in the lens of **Naam**, which provides the ontological anchoring that sustains ethical clarity and detachment over time. Where Bibek and Vairāg cultivate moral independence, Naam stabilizes that independence by orienting the leader toward a deeper source of meaning and ethical coherence.

The next section therefore explores how the Naam lens completes the architecture of leadership formation by grounding ethical action in an enduring interior orientation beyond ego and institutional identity.

8.6. The Naam Lens: Ontological Anchoring of Ethical Leadership

1 The Need for Ontological Anchoring in Leadership Formation

The preceding lenses—**Kaal**, **Māyā**, and **Bibek/Vairāg**—together establish a robust framework for ethical awakening and moral capacity formation. Kaal confronts leaders with the impermanence of worldly authority; Māyā exposes the distortions produced by attachment and ego; Bibek and Vairāg cultivate the discernment and detachment required for principled decision-making. Yet even when leaders possess such ethical capacities, an important question remains: **what ultimately sustains ethical action over time?**

Leadership responsibilities, particularly in complex institutions such as Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), often involve sustained exposure to pressure, conflict, public scrutiny, and moral ambiguity. Leaders may initially act with clarity and integrity, yet prolonged exposure

to institutional demands can gradually erode ethical steadiness. Fatigue, isolation, reputational anxiety, and institutional competition may weaken the resolve of even well-intentioned leaders. Under such conditions, ethical capacity alone may prove insufficient unless it is supported by a deeper source of interior stability.

Within the ethical pedagogy of *Salok Mahalla 9*, this deeper grounding is articulated through the concept of **Naam**. Naam refers to the remembrance and orientation of the self toward the Divine, which functions as the ultimate source of meaning, identity, and moral coherence. While the earlier lenses diagnose existential vulnerability and cultivate ethical discipline, Naam provides the **ontological anchoring** that stabilizes ethical life. It shifts the foundation of leadership identity from institutional role or personal reputation to a deeper spiritual orientation.

In the context of leadership formation, this anchoring is crucial because authority and responsibility often tempt individuals to define themselves primarily through position and performance. When leadership identity becomes tied to institutional success, public recognition, or professional reputation, ethical stability becomes vulnerable to the fluctuations of institutional life. Success may reinforce ego, while failure may provoke insecurity or defensiveness.

Naam offers an alternative grounding. By orienting the self toward the Divine rather than toward external validation, leaders develop a sense of identity that transcends the transient structures of institutional authority. Ethical action is no longer motivated primarily by personal success or institutional prestige but by alignment with a deeper moral orientation. Leadership becomes an expression of inner conviction rather than a performance shaped by external expectations.

Thus, the Naam lens introduces the dimension of **ontological anchoring** into leadership formation. It ensures that the ethical capacities cultivated through discernment and detachment remain stable over time. Leadership is no longer sustained solely by discipline or personal effort but by a deeper interior alignment that integrates moral intention with spiritual awareness.

2 Core Capacities Cultivated through the Naam Lens

When interpreted within the framework of leadership formation, the Naam lens cultivates several interrelated capacities that contribute to morally grounded and resilient leadership.

1. Fearless Steadiness
Remembrance of the Divine dissolves the fear that often accompanies positions of authority. Leaders anchored in Naam are less governed by anxiety regarding reputation, institutional survival, or personal loss. This steadiness allows them to make decisions grounded in long-term ethical considerations rather than short-term defensive reactions.

2. Humble Authority
Naam relativizes personal prestige and institutional ego. Authority is understood not as an instrument of domination but as a form of stewardship entrusted to the leader for the benefit of the community. Such humility encourages collaborative governance and strengthens trust within academic institutions.

3. Moral Resilience
Leadership responsibilities frequently generate emotional strain and moral fatigue. The anchoring provided by Naam offers an interior source of resilience. Leaders remain capable of sustaining ethical commitments even during periods of institutional crisis or personal difficulty.

4. Non-Performative Integrity
In many organizational contexts, ethical commitments may become symbolic or performative, expressed primarily through public declarations rather than lived practice. The Naam lens encourages authenticity by aligning ethical action with inner conviction. Integrity becomes a lived reality rather than an institutional display.

Together, these capacities mark a transition from **managerial leadership** to **morally grounded leadership**. Authority is exercised not merely through administrative competence but through interior steadiness and ethical authenticity.

3 The Naam-Informed Leadership Formation Model

The leadership formation model suggested by the Naam lens may be understood as a four-stage process through which interior anchoring gradually shapes institutional governance.

Stage 1: Interior Anchoring
The process begins with the cultivation of reflective awareness that situates identity beyond institutional role. Leaders engage in practices that encourage contemplation, ethical reflection, and remembrance of deeper moral commitments.
Stage 2: Ego Relativization
As interior awareness deepens, the significance of prestige, recognition, and institutional validation begins to diminish. Leaders learn to exercise authority without becoming attached to the symbolic rewards associated with leadership roles.
Stage 3: Ethical Stabilization
The combination of discernment, detachment, and spiritual orientation produces a stable ethical disposition. Leaders become capable of maintaining clarity and composure even during periods of institutional pressure or conflict.
Stage 4: Institutional Manifestation
Finally, the inner formation cultivated through Naam becomes visible within institutional practices. Governance becomes trust-based rather than fear-driven, academic freedom is protected through moral conviction, and institutional culture reflects ethical coherence.

This model demonstrates that institutional integrity emerges not primarily from external control mechanisms but from the interior orientation of those entrusted with leadership.

4 Naam as Leadership Stabilizer

In complex organizational environments, leadership identity is often shaped by fluctuating institutional conditions. Success may encourage pride, while failure may provoke insecurity or defensive behaviour. Such fluctuations can destabilize ethical leadership if identity remains tied to performance outcomes.

Naam functions as a stabilizing principle by relocating the center of identity beyond these fluctuations. When leaders ground their sense of self in a deeper spiritual orientation, external circumstances lose their capacity to determine ethical behaviour. Decisions are guided by enduring principles rather than by immediate institutional pressures.

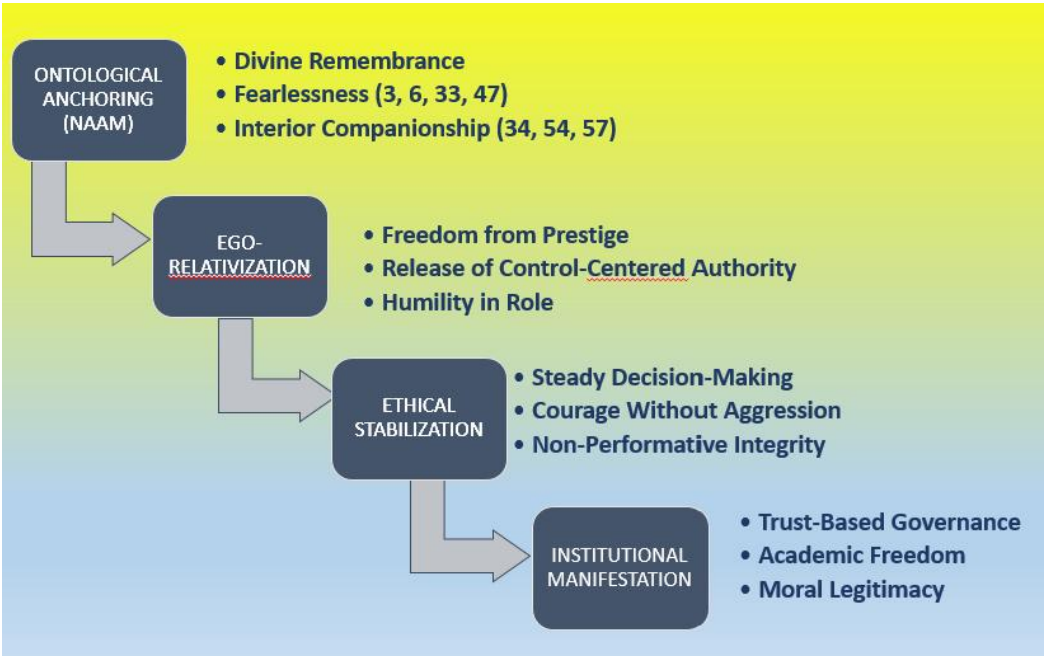


Figure 6. Naam as Ontological Anchoring Producing Institutional Integrity (Four-Tier Model)

The stabilizing function of Naam thus protects leadership from two common distortions: ego-driven authority and fear-driven decision-making. Leaders anchored in Naam are able to exercise authority with both humility and courage, maintaining ethical consistency even in uncertain circumstances.

5 From Role-Based Identity to Anchored Identity

Another important implication of the Naam lens concerns the transformation of leadership identity. In many institutional contexts, leadership identity is defined primarily by role:

administrators understand themselves through their titles, responsibilities, and positions within organizational hierarchies. While such roles are necessary for institutional functioning, they can become sources of attachment and anxiety if they are treated as the primary foundation of personal identity.

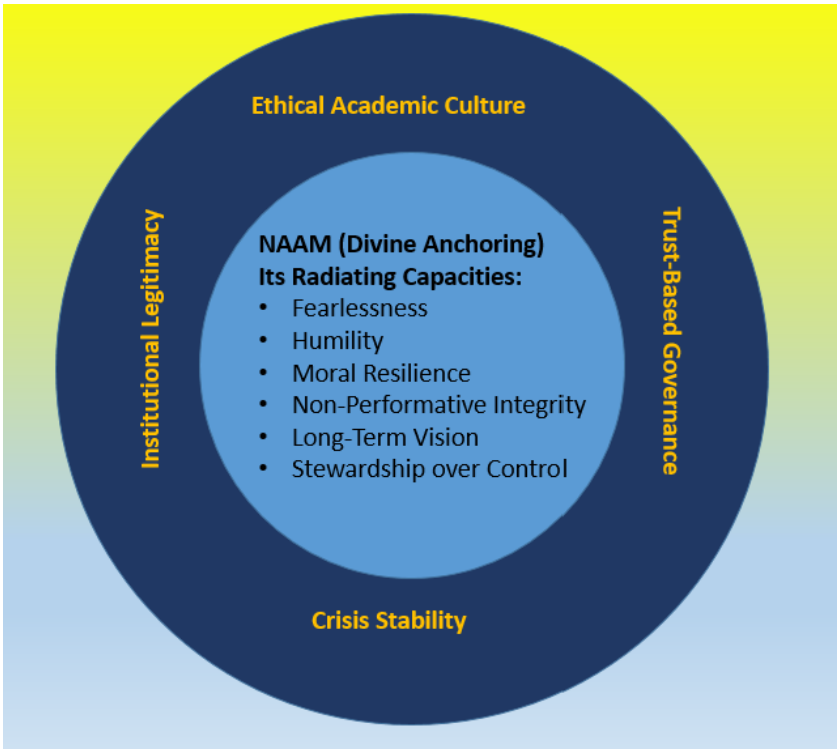


Figure 7. Naam as Leadership Stabilizer

The Naam perspective invites a shift from **role-based identity** to **anchored identity**. Leaders recognize that their roles are temporary expressions of responsibility rather than permanent sources of self-definition. Identity becomes grounded in deeper ethical and spiritual commitments rather than in institutional recognition.

This transformation does not diminish the importance of leadership roles; rather, it enables individuals to inhabit those roles with greater freedom and integrity. Authority becomes a form of service rather than a means of self-affirmation.

6 Implications for Leadership Training Programs in HEIs

Incorporating the Naam lens into leadership development programs requires expanding the scope of leadership education beyond managerial competence to include practices that cultivate interior reflection and ethical grounding. Such programs may include structured opportunities for reflective journaling, contemplative dialogue, and ethical deliberation that encourage leaders to examine the deeper motivations guiding their decisions.

Training modules may also emphasize the development of long-term moral vision, encouraging leaders to evaluate institutional policies and practices in relation to enduring ethical commitments rather than short-term performance metrics. By integrating reflective practices with governance training, leadership education can foster the interior steadiness necessary for ethical decision-making.

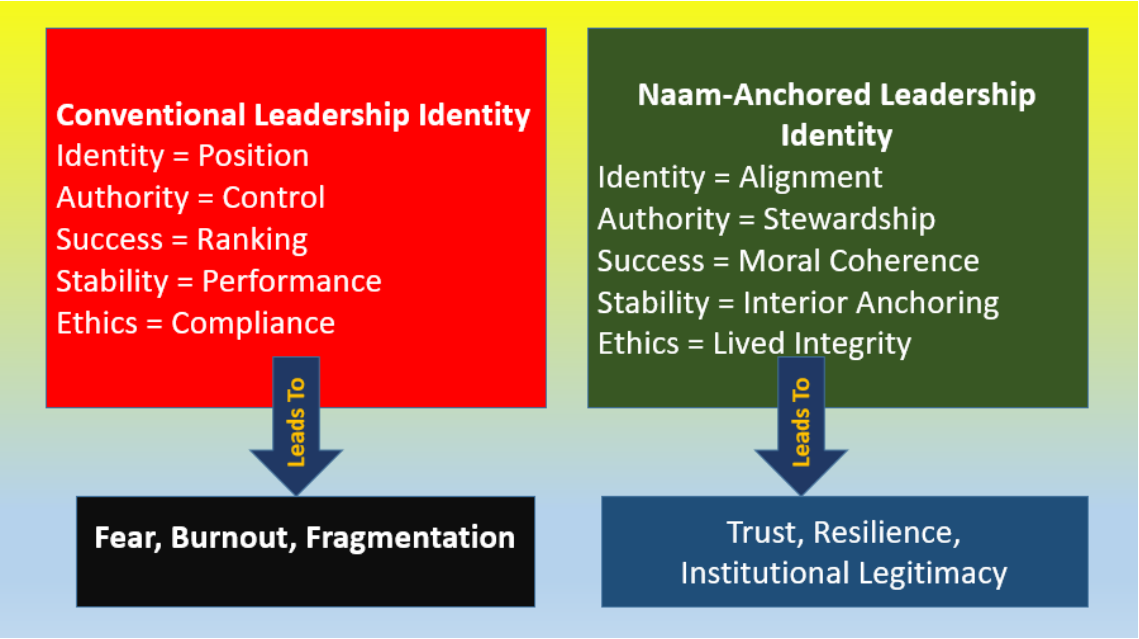


Figure 8. From Role-Based Identity to Anchored Identity (Comparative Model)

Importantly, the application of the Naam lens within pluralistic academic environments does not require sectarian instruction. Instead, Naam may be translated into universally intelligible concepts such as moral anchoring, reflective consciousness, and alignment between personal values and institutional responsibility.

7 Integrative Contribution of the Naam Lens

Within the ethical architecture of leadership formation developed throughout this chapter, the Naam lens provides the culminating dimension. It anchors the insights and capacities cultivated through the preceding lenses and ensures their sustainability.

The progression may therefore be summarized as follows:

- **Kaal** awakens awareness of impermanence.
- **Māyā** reveals the distortions created by attachment and illusion.
- **Bibek/Vairāg** cultivate discernment and disciplined detachment.
- **Naam** stabilizes ethical life through ontological anchoring.

Together, these stages form a coherent pathway from existential awareness to moral freedom. Leadership formed through this progression becomes capable of exercising authority with humility, clarity, and ethical consistency.

8 Scope and Limits of the Naam Lens

Although the Naam lens offers a profound framework for ethical grounding, its application within institutional contexts must be understood carefully. Ontological anchoring cannot be imposed through administrative policy, nor can spiritual orientation be mandated within pluralistic academic environments.

Rather, the contribution of the Naam lens lies in its conceptual insight: sustainable ethical leadership requires an interior foundation that transcends institutional role identity. Structural reforms, governance mechanisms, and regulatory frameworks remain necessary components of institutional life. However, without the moral stability provided by interior anchoring, such structures may remain fragile.

The Naam lens therefore completes the ethical architecture of leadership formation by demonstrating that institutional integrity ultimately depends upon the interior orientation of those entrusted with authority. Leadership grounded in such anchoring becomes capable not only of managing institutions effectively but also of sustaining the moral legitimacy upon which the credibility of Higher Education Institutions ultimately rests.

8.7 Integrative Model of Leadership Formation in Higher Education Institutions

Synthesizing the Ethical Architecture of Salok Mahalla 9

The integrative model of leadership formation in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) emerges from the ethical architecture illustrated in **Figure 1**, which organizes the four lenses—**Kaal, Māyā, Bibek/Vairāg, and Naam**—into a coherent developmental progression. Rather than functioning as isolated ethical concepts, these lenses form a **sequential and interdependent process of leadership formation**, moving from existential awareness to stabilized ethical freedom.

This architecture reframes leadership development not merely as a set of managerial competencies but as a **process of interior ethical transformation that ultimately manifests in institutional integrity**.

The Sequential Ethical Movement

Figure 1 presents the four lenses as **layered movements in the formation of ethical leadership**. Each stage performs a distinct formative function while preparing the ground for the next stage. Together they constitute a progression from **ontological diagnosis to moral freedom**.

1 Kaal → Existential Awakening

The process begins with the **Kaal lens**, which introduces the awareness of impermanence. In the ethical architecture, Kaal functions as the **ontological diagnostic stage**.

Leadership structures within universities often operate under implicit assumptions of stability—authority, prestige, institutional legacy, and career permanence. The Kaal lens disrupts these assumptions by confronting leaders with the reality that **all institutional structures, reputations, and positions are temporally fragile**.

Through this awakening:

- Leaders become conscious of the **limits of power and control**.
- Institutional authority is tempered by **humility**.
- Leadership identity shifts from **positional dominance to responsible stewardship**.

Within the integrative model, Kaal therefore initiates leadership formation by **destabilizing the egoic foundations of authority**, creating the existential openness necessary for deeper ethical reflection.

2 Māyā → Ethical Clarification

Once existential humility has been awakened, the model moves to the **Māyā lens**, which performs the function of **ethical clarification**.

Where Kaal exposes the fragility of institutional life, Māyā reveals the **internal distortions that shape human perception and decision-making**. In academic institutions these distortions frequently manifest through:

- competition for recognition,
- attachment to institutional prestige,
- pursuit of rankings, reputation, or personal advancement.

The Māyā lens therefore enables leaders to **identify the psychological forces that obscure ethical judgment**. It exposes how institutional systems may normalize behaviours driven by ego, ambition, or fear while appearing procedurally legitimate.

Within the integrative architecture, this stage accomplishes two essential tasks:

1. **Cognitive illumination** – leaders recognize how illusion operates within organizational life.
2. **Ethical demystification** – leaders begin to distinguish institutional success from ethical integrity.

Thus, Māyā prepares leaders for ethical formation by **clarifying the moral terrain within which leadership decisions occur**.

3 Bibek/Vairāg → Moral Formation

After illusion has been exposed, the ethical challenge shifts from diagnosis to **capacity formation**. This stage is represented by the **Bibek (discernment) and Vairāg (detachment) lenses**.

Within the architecture of Figure 1, these capacities function as the **core ethical competencies required for responsible leadership**.

Bibek enables leaders to:

- distinguish between ethically grounded decisions and expedient compromises,
- interpret complex institutional dilemmas with moral clarity,
- evaluate competing interests without losing sight of ethical principles.

Vairāg, by contrast, stabilizes discernment by cultivating **detachment from ego-driven incentives**, including recognition, status, institutional pressure, or political advantage.

Together, these capacities transform ethical awareness into **practical moral agency**. Leaders become capable of acting with integrity even when institutional incentives encourage compromise.

Within HEIs this stage is particularly critical because universities often operate within **complex bureaucratic and competitive environments**. Ethical clarity alone is insufficient; leaders must possess the **interior freedom necessary to act upon it**.

Thus, Bibek and Vairāg constitute the **formative center of the leadership model**, converting insight into disciplined ethical practice.

4 Naam → Moral Freedom

The ethical architecture culminates in the **Naam lens**, which provides the **ontological anchoring of ethical leadership**.

While the previous stages cultivate humility, ethical clarity, and moral capacity, they remain vulnerable to instability if they rely solely on personal discipline or institutional accountability mechanisms. The Naam lens stabilizes these capacities by grounding leadership in **continuous remembrance of the Divine as the ultimate source of truth and ethical coherence**.
Within the integrative model, Naam performs three stabilizing functions:

1. **Interior anchoring** – ethical action emerges from spiritual alignment rather than external enforcement.
2. **Moral resilience** – leaders remain ethically grounded even in conditions of institutional pressure or ambiguity.
3. **Freedom from egoic dependence** – leadership is no longer driven by recognition, reputation, or personal advancement.

Through Naam, leadership reaches its final stage: **moral freedom**. Ethical action becomes internally sustained rather than externally regulated.

8.8 The Integrated Leadership Formation Cycle

Taken together, the four lenses create a **continuous cycle of ethical leadership formation**:

Stage	Lens	Leadership Transformation
Ontological Diagnosis	**Kaal**	Awakens humility through awareness of impermanence
Ethical Clarification	**Māyā**	Exposes illusion and distortion in institutional life
Moral Formation	**Bibek / Vairāg**	Develops discernment and detachment for principled action
Moral Freedom	**Naam**	Anchors leadership in stable ethical consciousness

Rather than representing isolated stages, these movements form an **integrated ethical architecture** in which each stage deepens the preceding one.

- **Kaal** destabilizes ego-based authority.
- **Māyā** clarifies the illusions shaping ethical judgment.
- **Bibek/Vairāg** cultivate the capacities required for principled leadership.
- **Naam** stabilizes these capacities within a transcendent moral orientation.

8.9 Implications for Leadership Formation in HEIs

Figure 1 also reveals a critical insight for leadership development within Higher Education Institutions: **ethical governance cannot be produced solely through procedural reform**. Universities frequently attempt to address ethical crises through:

- regulatory frameworks,
- compliance systems,
- governance policies,
- accountability mechanisms.

While these structures are necessary, they operate primarily at the **external level of institutional control**. The ethical architecture presented here suggests that **sustainable institutional integrity emerges from interior leadership formation**.

The integrative model therefore implies that leadership training in HEIs should cultivate:

- existential awareness of responsibility (Kaal),
- critical reflection on institutional illusions (Māyā),
- disciplined moral judgment (Bibek),
- freedom from ego-driven incentives (Vairāg),
- and spiritual anchoring of ethical purpose (Naam).

When these dimensions are integrated, leadership is able to operate with **moral clarity, resilience, and freedom**, enabling institutions to sustain ethical legitimacy in complex academic environments.

8.10 Toward an Ethical Ecology of Institutional Leadership

Ultimately, the architecture of Figure 1 reframes leadership formation as a **transformative ethical ecology** rather than a set of managerial techniques.

The model demonstrates that:

- **existential insight** initiates ethical awareness,
- **ethical clarification** reveals the distortions of institutional life,
- **moral formation** develops the capacities necessary for responsible action,
- and **spiritual anchoring** stabilizes leadership within enduring ethical freedom.

Through this progression — **Kaal → Māyā → Bibek/Vairāg → Naam** — leadership evolves from **awareness of impermanence to the realization of moral freedom**, enabling higher education leaders to exercise authority with integrity, humility, and ethical coherence.

8.11 Leadership Formation Modules Derived from the Ethical Architecture of Salok Mahalla 9.

1. Kaal-Informed Leadership Formation Module

Impermanence as Ethical Awakening

Module Component	Core Focus	Training Activities	Leadership Capacity Developed	Measurement Indicators
Existential Awareness of Impermanence (Kaal)	Recognition of mortality and institutional transience	Impermanence reflection exercises; leadership life-cycle mapping; historical case studies of institutional rise and decline	Humility in leadership; awareness of limits of authority	Depth of reflective articulation; increased ethical seriousness in discussion
Role Detachment	Distinguishing leadership responsibility from personal identity	Role-reflection workshops; stewardship vs. ownership dialogues	Reduced ego-identification with position; stewardship mindset	Reduced defensiveness in leadership feedback sessions
Ethical Independence from Relationships	Freedom from relational and political pressures	Ethical dilemma discussions involving collegial loyalty vs. institutional responsibility	Impartial judgment; principled decision-making	Consistency in ethical case responses; peer observation

Module Component	Core Focus	Training Activities	Leadership Capacity Developed	Measurement Indicators
Scholarly Humility	Relativizing prestige and intellectual pride	Workshops on academic prestige culture; reflective dialogue on intellectual humility	Humble authority; openness to critique	Increased collaborative participation; reduced dominance in deliberation
Moral Urgency and Responsibility	Awareness of limited time for ethical action	Crisis reflection exercises; "delayed decision consequences" simulations	Decisive ethical action; responsibility awareness	Timely ethical responses in simulations; reflective leadership evaluation

2. Māyā-Informed Leadership Formation Module

Ethical Clarity in Institutional Life

Module Component	Core Focus	Training Activities	Leadership Capacity Developed	Measurement Indicators
Awareness of Institutional Illusion (Māyā)	Recognizing distortion caused by prestige, rankings, and competition	Institutional narrative analysis; ranking-system critiques; prestige culture workshops	Ethical awareness of systemic distortion	Critical reflection depth; ability to identify institutional bias
Appearance vs Ethical Substance	Distinguishing symbolic ethics from genuine integrity	Case analysis of performative policies vs real governance practices	Ethical clarity; principled evaluation of institutional actions	Improved ethical reasoning scores in scenario exercises
Detachment from Recognition	Freedom from validation dependence	Reflection on leadership motivation; peer dialogue on reputation-driven leadership	Reduced prestige-dependence; authenticity	Reduced reputation-protective decision-making
Ethical Independence from Patronage	Avoiding influence of	Case studies involving favoritism,	Impartial governance;	Transparency in simulated

Module Component	Core Focus	Training Activities	Leadership Capacity Developed	Measurement Indicators
	networks and alliances	conflict of interest, and academic politics	fairness in leadership	governance decisions
Stability in Competitive Environments	Maintaining ethical clarity amid institutional competition	Comparative university ranking scenario simulations	Integrity-focused decision-making	Ethical consistency under competitive pressure

3. Bibek/Vairāg Leadership Formation Module

Ethical Capacity Formation

Module Component	Core Focus	Training Activities	Leadership Capacity Developed	Measurement Indicators
Ethical Discernment (Bibek)	Recognizing moral dimensions in complex decisions	Ethical reasoning workshops; governance dilemma case studies	Moral perception; principled judgment	Accuracy in identifying ethical implications
Detachment from Outcomes (Vairāg)	Acting ethically without attachment to results	Reflective dialogue on success/failure; leadership consequence simulations	Emotional stability; outcome-independent decision-making	Reduced anxiety-driven decision shifts
Emotional Regulation	Maintaining composure under institutional pressure	Crisis simulations; leadership stress reflection exercises	Ethical steadiness; thoughtful response	Behavioural stability in high-pressure scenarios
Moral Courage	Upholding principle despite opposition	Ethical confrontation role-play; whistleblowing case discussions	Courageous leadership; integrity in adversity	Peer evaluation during ethical conflict simulations
Ethical Consistency	Alignment between discernment and governance behaviour	Policy decision simulations; governance integrity mapping	Reliable ethical leadership	Policy consistency across simulated cases

4. Naam Leadership Formation Module

Ontological Anchoring for Moral Freedom

Module Component	Core Focus	Training Activities	Leadership Capacity Developed	Measurement Indicators
Ontological Anchoring (Naam)	Identity beyond role; existential steadiness	Reflective journaling; contemplative ethical reflection; impermanence analysis exercises	Interior stability; freedom from fear and prestige fixation	Depth of reflective articulation; reduced reactivity in simulations; peer observation feedback
Ego-Relativization	Humility in authority; release of validation-dependence	Workshops on prestige culture; ranking obsession analysis; stewardship discussions	Humble authority; reduced control-centered governance	Behavioural consistency under reputational pressure; collaborative decision-making trends
Ethical Stabilization	Courage without aggression; non-performative integrity	Crisis scenario simulations; moral dilemma deliberations; structured ethical dialogues	Moral resilience; steady decision-making	Stability during case simulations; reduced policy oscillation; peer & stakeholder feedback
Institutional Coherence Formation	Alignment of mission, culture, and governance	Academic freedom forums; mission-to-practice mapping sessions; governance transparency exercises	Trust-based leadership; long-term institutional vision	Trust surveys; reduced conflict escalation; alignment between policy and practice

Summary

From Ontological Diagnosis to Moral Freedom

This chapter has sought to demonstrate that the ethical insights embedded within *Salok Mahalla 9* can be translated into a coherent framework for leadership formation in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Building upon the philosophical and ethical analyses presented in earlier chapters, the discussion moved from interpretive reflection to applied synthesis, proposing that the saloks articulate a structured pathway of ethical development relevant to contemporary institutional leadership.

At the center of this framework lies the **ethical architecture of Salok Mahalla 9**, which unfolds through the interconnected lenses of **Kaal, Māyā, Bibek/Vairāg, and Naam**. Rather than representing isolated spiritual themes, these concepts together form a pedagogical progression that guides the individual from existential awareness toward moral freedom. This architecture begins with the recognition of impermanence, proceeds through the exposure of illusion and the cultivation of discernment and detachment, and culminates in the ontological anchoring of ethical life. Through this progression, the saloks present leadership not merely as an exercise of authority but as a process of interior ethical transformation.

The **Kaal lens** initiates this transformation by confronting the individual with the reality of impermanence. Awareness of the transient nature of authority, reputation, and institutional success destabilizes ego-centered leadership and introduces humility. Leadership roles are reinterpreted as temporary responsibilities rather than enduring possessions. This existential awakening prepares the leader to examine more deeply the motivations and attachments that shape ethical judgment.

The **Māyā lens** then reveals the distortions produced by attachment to prestige, recognition, and symbolic success. In institutional environments such as universities, where reputational metrics and competitive narratives often shape decision-making, this insight is particularly significant. By exposing the difference between appearance and ethical substance, the Māyā lens cultivates clarity of perception. Leaders become capable of recognizing how institutional narratives may obscure deeper ethical responsibilities.

The ethical architecture then moves from diagnosis to formation through the **Bibek/Vairāg lens**. Discernment enables leaders to identify the moral dimensions of complex institutional decisions, while detachment frees them from dependence on personal recognition or institutional validation. Together these capacities transform ethical awareness into disciplined moral agency. Leaders are no longer guided primarily by expediency or institutional pressure but by principled judgment and moral independence.

Finally, the architecture culminates in the **Naam lens**, which provides the ontological anchoring necessary for the stability of ethical life. By grounding leadership identity beyond institutional role and personal achievement, Naam sustains ethical action over time. Authority becomes an expression of inner alignment rather than external performance. Through this anchoring, leadership reaches the stage of **moral freedom**, where ethical conduct is guided not by fear, prestige, or institutional pressure but by an interior orientation toward truth and responsibility.

Taken together, these four movements form a coherent progression:
Kaal → Māyā → Bibek/Vairāg → Naam
Ontological Diagnosis → Ethical Clarification → Moral Formation → Moral Freedom

This progression reveals that ethical leadership is not produced primarily through administrative technique or regulatory compliance. Instead, it emerges from the gradual transformation of the leader's interior orientation.

From the perspective of **leadership studies**, the framework developed in this chapter contributes to ongoing discussions regarding the ethical foundations of leadership. Much contemporary leadership theory emphasizes competencies, organizational strategy, and governance structures. While these dimensions are essential for effective administration, they often treat ethics as an external regulatory framework rather than as a process of interior formation. The ethical architecture derived from *Salok Mahalla 9* challenges this assumption by demonstrating that ethical governance ultimately depends upon the moral perception, independence, and stability of the leader.

In this sense, the chapter proposes a **formation-based model of leadership**, in which ethical awareness precedes managerial competence and interior discipline sustains institutional responsibility. Such a model expands leadership studies by integrating philosophical anthropology, ethical reflection, and spiritual insight into the analysis of leadership practice.

The framework also holds particular **significance for Higher Education Institutions**. Universities occupy a unique position in society as communities dedicated to knowledge, intellectual inquiry, and public trust. Yet they increasingly operate within environments characterized by competition, performance metrics, reputational pressures, and complex governance challenges. Under such conditions, institutional reforms often focus on procedural solutions—policy development, regulatory oversight, and compliance systems.

While these mechanisms remain necessary, they cannot by themselves ensure ethical integrity. Institutional structures ultimately depend upon the character and judgment of those entrusted with authority. When leadership formation neglects the interior orientation of leaders, even well-designed governance systems may fail to prevent ethical distortion.

The ethical architecture of *Salok Mahalla 9* therefore offers a distinctive contribution to leadership development in HEIs. By addressing impermanence, illusion, discernment, and ontological anchoring, it provides a pathway through which leaders may cultivate humility, clarity, moral independence, and resilience. Leadership education informed by this framework would not only train administrators to manage institutions effectively but also prepare them to exercise authority with ethical integrity.

The central insight that emerges from this chapter may therefore be stated clearly: **leadership formation must precede institutional reform**. Policies and governance structures can guide behaviour, but they cannot substitute for the ethical consciousness of the leader. Sustainable institutional integrity arises when leaders themselves undergo a process of ethical transformation that reorients their understanding of authority, responsibility, and identity.

The ethical pedagogy of *Salok Mahalla 9* thus invites a reimagining of leadership development within higher education. Rather than focusing exclusively on managerial competence, leadership education may be understood as a formative journey that begins with existential awareness and culminates in moral freedom. When leaders are formed through such a progression, institutional governance becomes not merely a system of regulation but an expression of ethical clarity and responsible stewardship.

In this way, the ethical architecture explored throughout this chapter demonstrates how insights rooted in Gurmat thought can illuminate contemporary debates in leadership studies and offer meaningful guidance for the cultivation of ethically grounded leadership within Higher Education Institutions.

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Chapter 9

Ethical Leadership Formation in Higher Education: A Training Architecture Based on Salok Mahalla 9

9.1 Introduction

From Existential Insight to Leadership Formation

The preceding chapters of this book have examined *Salok Mahalla 9* as a profound philosophical and ethical reflection on the human condition. Through close engagement with the saloks attributed to Guru Tegh Bahadur, the analysis has traced a coherent ethical pedagogy addressing the fundamental distortions that shape human decision-making: fear of loss, attachment to prestige, illusion of permanence, and dependence on external validation. While these insights are deeply rooted in spiritual reflection, their implications extend far beyond devotional discourse. They offer a framework for understanding the ethical challenges that arise within complex institutional environments, including contemporary Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

Universities today operate within systems characterized by intense competition, performance measurement, reputational hierarchies, and administrative pressures. Leadership in such contexts is frequently evaluated through managerial effectiveness, strategic planning, and measurable outputs. While these competencies are important, they do not necessarily cultivate the ethical clarity required for leadership under conditions of ambiguity, pressure, and institutional conflict. Many institutional failures—ranging from suppression of academic freedom to governance decisions shaped by prestige or patronage—cannot be adequately explained through technical deficiencies alone. Rather, they reflect deeper distortions in ethical perception and judgment.

This chapter therefore shifts the focus of the study from philosophical interpretation to institutional application. It proposes that the ethical insights derived from *Salok Mahalla 9* can be translated into a structured **leadership formation architecture for Higher Education Institutions**. The objective is not the introduction of a religious curriculum within universities, but the development of a **formation-oriented leadership training model** capable of cultivating ethical clarity, discernment, and interior steadiness among institutional leaders.

At the centre of this chapter lies a key claim:

> **Ethical leadership in Higher Education cannot be secured solely through policies, compliance mechanisms, or performance metrics. Institutional integrity ultimately depends upon leaders who are inwardly formed—leaders capable of recognizing illusion, exercising discernment, and acting with steadiness independent of prestige, fear, or institutional pressure.**

This claim reframes leadership development as a process of **ethical formation rather than managerial enhancement**. Policies and governance structures remain necessary, yet they cannot compensate for leaders whose ethical judgment is shaped by attachment, insecurity, or reputational anxiety. Conversely, institutions led by individuals formed in clarity and detachment are capable of sustaining ethical governance even within complex and competitive environments.

The philosophical analysis developed across the earlier chapters reveals that *Salok Mahalla 9* presents not isolated moral exhortations but a **progressive pedagogy of ethical formation**. This pedagogy unfolds through four interconnected stages that together form a coherent model of leadership development.

The first stage emerges through the recognition of **Kaal**, the reality of death and impermanence. Awareness of mortality dissolves the illusion of permanence attached to status, position, and institutional authority. When leaders confront impermanence, fear of losing position or recognition begins to weaken, creating the possibility of moral courage.

The second stage involves the recognition of **Māyā**, the illusions that distort ethical perception. In institutional contexts, Māyā manifests through prestige hierarchies, ranking systems, reputational narratives, and performative success. By exposing the difference between appearance and substance, this stage cultivates ethical clarity.

The third stage introduces the disciplined capacities of **Bibek (discernment)** and **Vairāg (detachment)**. Discernment enables leaders to distinguish principle from convenience, while detachment stabilizes judgment by freeing decision-making from attachment to outcomes, approval, or positional advantage. Together, these capacities form the ethical backbone of leadership.

The final stage culminates in **Naam**, understood not merely as devotional remembrance but as a state of ontological anchoring. At this stage leadership identity becomes grounded beyond fluctuating institutional circumstances. Authority is exercised as stewardship rather than possession, and action arises from inner steadiness rather than reactive insecurity.

These four stages form the conceptual progression underlying the leadership model proposed in this chapter:

Human Condition → Kaal → Māyā → Bibek/Vairāg → Naam → Moral Freedom → Institutional Integrity

This progression represents a movement from existential awareness to ethical capacity and ultimately to institutional consequence. The model suggests that institutional integrity is not primarily engineered through regulatory expansion but emerges from leaders who have undergone a process of inner formation.

The remainder of this chapter develops this insight into a structured **Leadership Training Module for Higher Education Institutions**. Drawing upon the four philosophical themes explored in the previous chapters, the module proposes a pedagogical architecture designed to cultivate ethical awareness, discernment, detachment, and moral anchoring among academic leaders. Each theme is translated into a training module with clearly defined objectives, learning activities, assessment mechanisms, and institutional implications.

In doing so, the chapter advances the broader argument of this study: the ethical renewal of universities cannot be achieved through administrative reform alone. It requires a deeper engagement with the conditions that shape human judgment and leadership identity. By translating the insights of *Salok Mahalla 9* into a formation-based leadership framework, this chapter seeks to contribute to the development of ethical leadership education that strengthens institutional integrity while remaining accessible across diverse cultural and institutional contexts.

9.2 Conceptual Architecture of the Leadership Formation Model

The leadership training framework proposed in this chapter rests upon a conceptual architecture derived from the ethical insights of *Salok Mahalla 9*. The preceding chapters demonstrated that the reflections attributed to Guru Tegh Bahadur are not merely devotional aphorisms but constitute a coherent philosophical exploration of the human condition. When examined collectively, these saloks articulate a progressive pedagogy that addresses the existential anxieties, cognitive distortions, and ethical vulnerabilities that shape human conduct.

This pedagogy provides a foundation for rethinking leadership formation in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Rather than approaching leadership solely as a managerial skill set, the conceptual model presented here understands leadership development as a process of **ethical and existential formation**. In this perspective, institutional leadership is not merely a function of administrative authority or strategic competence; it is the outward manifestation of inward clarity, disciplined judgment, and moral steadiness.

The architecture of the leadership formation model therefore proceeds through a structured sequence of ethical insights, each addressing a particular dimension of human vulnerability. These insights, explored in the earlier chapters, collectively form a four-stage developmental pathway that moves from existential awareness to ethical capacity and finally to institutional integrity. The conceptual logic of this progression is elaborated below.

9.2.1 The Pedagogical Logic of the Four Themes

The ethical pedagogy embedded within *Salok Mahalla 9* unfolds through four interconnected stages, each corresponding to a theme examined in the previous chapters. These stages do not represent isolated concepts but rather a sequential process through which ethical clarity emerges and stabilizes.

The first stage arises through the recognition of **Kaal**, the reality of death and impermanence. Awareness of mortality functions as an existential equalizer, dissolving illusions of permanence attached to status, authority, and institutional position. In the context of leadership, this awareness weakens fear-based attachment to office, recognition, or reputation. When leaders confront the inevitability of impermanence, the psychological foundations of ethical compromise begin to erode. Decisions are no longer governed solely by the desire to preserve position or status, but can be oriented toward principles that transcend immediate institutional advantage.

The second stage involves the recognition of **Māyā**, the complex web of illusion that distorts human perception. Within institutional environments, Māyā manifests through prestige hierarchies, performance metrics, ranking systems, and narratives of success that reward appearance rather than integrity. Leaders operating within such systems often become entangled in symbolic forms of achievement that obscure ethical substance. By exposing the difference between appearance and reality, the pedagogy of Māyā trains leaders to identify the subtle distortions that influence institutional decision-making. Ethical clarity emerges when leaders learn to distinguish genuine institutional well-being from reputational spectacle.

The third stage introduces the ethical capacities of **Bibek (discernment)** and **Vairāg (detachment)**. Discernment enables leaders to perceive ethical distinctions that may be obscured by institutional pressures or relational loyalties. Detachment, in turn, stabilizes this discernment by freeing leadership judgment from attachment to outcomes, prestige, or approval. Together, these capacities form the ethical backbone of leadership formation. Leaders who cultivate discernment without detachment may still succumb to pressures arising from ambition, recognition, or institutional politics. Conversely, detachment without discernment risks indifference or disengagement. The integration of Bibek and Vairāg therefore produces a balanced ethical disposition characterized by clarity of perception and steadiness of action.

The fourth and culminating stage is represented by **Naam**, understood here as a state of ontological anchoring. At this stage leadership identity becomes grounded in an enduring moral orientation rather than fluctuating institutional circumstances. Authority is no longer experienced as personal possession but as entrusted responsibility. Leaders anchored in Naam act with composure even under conditions of uncertainty, because their ethical orientation is not dependent upon institutional validation or reputational success.

Taken together, these stages form a coherent developmental progression:

Kaal → Māyā → Bibek/Vairāg → Naam

In this progression, existential awareness dissolves fear, recognition of illusion clarifies perception, disciplined discernment stabilizes judgment, and ontological anchoring sustains moral freedom. The resulting leadership identity is capable of navigating institutional complexity without surrendering ethical integrity.

9.2.2 Ethical Leadership as Formation Rather than Compliance

The conceptual architecture outlined above implies a fundamental reorientation of how leadership development is understood within Higher Education Institutions. Contemporary leadership programs in universities often emphasize technical competencies such as strategic planning, financial management, regulatory compliance, and performance evaluation. While these skills are indispensable for effective administration, they do not necessarily cultivate the ethical clarity required for leadership under conditions of ambiguity and institutional pressure. Many ethical failures in academic institutions occur not because policies are absent, but because leaders interpret or apply those policies through lenses shaped by fear, attachment, or reputational concern. Compliance frameworks, audit structures, and codes of conduct can regulate behaviour to a certain extent, yet they cannot guarantee ethical judgment when competing interests, relational pressures, or institutional incentives create moral ambiguity.

The leadership formation model proposed in this chapter addresses this limitation by shifting the focus from **external regulation to internal formation**. Rather than assuming that ethical behaviour can be secured primarily through rules and oversight, the model recognizes that institutional integrity ultimately depends upon the moral formation of those who exercise authority.

In a compliance-oriented paradigm, ethics is treated as a matter of adherence to prescribed procedures. Leaders are evaluated according to whether they follow established rules and achieve measurable outcomes. While such mechanisms provide necessary safeguards, they may also encourage performative behaviour in which leaders prioritize symbolic compliance over substantive integrity. Ethical conduct becomes equated with the appearance of conformity rather than the cultivation of principled judgment.

A formation-oriented paradigm, by contrast, emphasizes the development of leadership character and ethical perception. Within this framework, training programs aim to cultivate the capacities that enable leaders to recognize illusion, resist institutional pressures, and act consistently with ethical principles even when doing so involves personal or professional risk.

The emphasis shifts from procedural correctness to moral clarity.

The four-stage model derived from *Salok Mahalla 9* provides a structured pathway for such formation. By beginning with existential awareness (Kaal), exposing distortions (Māyā), cultivating discernment and detachment (Bibek/Vairāg), and ultimately stabilizing leadership

identity through anchoring (Naam), the model addresses the deeper psychological and ethical dynamics that shape institutional decision-making.

In this sense, the conceptual architecture proposed here does not reject governance mechanisms or regulatory frameworks. Instead, it situates them within a broader understanding of institutional ethics. Policies and procedures may guide institutional conduct, but their effectiveness ultimately depends upon leaders capable of interpreting and applying them with integrity.

The implication for Higher Education Institutions is clear: sustainable ethical governance cannot be achieved through structural reform alone. It requires leadership formation that addresses the existential, cognitive, and moral dimensions of human decision-making. The leadership training modules developed in the following sections translate this conceptual architecture into practical pedagogical structures designed for implementation within institutional leadership development programs.

9.3 Leadership Training Architecture for Higher Education Institutions

The conceptual framework outlined in the preceding section establishes the ethical and philosophical foundations of the leadership formation model derived from *Salok Mahalla 9*. The next step is to translate this conceptual architecture into a practical pedagogical structure capable of guiding leadership development within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Section 9.3 therefore introduces the **Leadership Training Architecture** that operationalizes the insights of the preceding analysis.

This architecture is not intended as a prescriptive curriculum or a sectarian program. Rather, it offers a **formation-oriented framework** that institutions may adapt to their own cultural and institutional contexts. The primary objective of this framework is to cultivate leaders who are capable of exercising ethical judgment under conditions of uncertainty, institutional pressure, and competing interests. The training model therefore focuses on developing **ethical clarity, discernment, detachment, and interior steadiness**, qualities that sustain responsible leadership beyond formal compliance with institutional policies.

At its core, the training architecture recognizes that leadership development in universities must address not only technical competencies but also the deeper ethical and existential dynamics that influence decision-making. Administrative skill alone does not guarantee integrity; leaders must also learn to recognize the distortions that arise from fear, prestige, attachment, and institutional incentives. The training framework proposed here therefore integrates philosophical reflection with experiential learning methods designed to cultivate ethical awareness and disciplined judgment.

The architecture consists of **four interrelated leadership formation modules**, each corresponding to a central theme identified in the analysis of *Salok Mahalla 9* attributed to Guru Tegh Bahadur. These modules collectively form a progressive pedagogical sequence that moves from existential awareness to moral freedom and institutional integrity.

The four modules are organized as follows:

Module	Ethical Theme	Leadership Focus	Leadership Capacity Developed
Module I	Death and Impermanence (Kaal)	Existential awareness and moral urgency	Ethical courage and humility in authority
Module II	Illusion and Ethical Distortion (Māyā)	Recognition of institutional illusion	Integrity against performative success
Module III	Discernment and Detachment (Bibek/Vairāg)	Stabilization of ethical judgment	Moral independence and impartial decision-making
Module IV	Ontological Anchoring (Naam)	Interior steadiness and leadership identity	Moral freedom and stewardship-based authority

Each module addresses a particular dimension of ethical formation while simultaneously reinforcing the others. The sequence reflects the pedagogical progression identified in Section 9.2. Awareness of impermanence (Kaal) weakens fear-based attachment to authority; recognition of illusion (Māyā) exposes distortions within institutional culture; discernment and detachment (Bibek/Vairāg) stabilize ethical judgment; and anchoring in Naam cultivates the interior steadiness necessary for sustained moral leadership.

Importantly, these modules are not designed to function as isolated instructional units. Rather, they form a **coherent developmental pathway** in which each stage deepens and stabilizes the insights gained in the previous one. Leadership formation thus becomes a cumulative process in which existential awareness, ethical perception, disciplined judgment, and moral anchoring gradually reinforce one another.

To ensure pedagogical coherence, each module within the training architecture follows a **consistent structural format**. This uniform structure facilitates both instructional implementation and evaluative assessment across different institutional contexts. Each module therefore contains the following components:

1. **Module Objective**: A concise statement identifying the ethical capacity or leadership competence the module seeks to cultivate.
2. **Conceptual Foundation**: A brief explanation of the philosophical insight derived from *Salok Mahalla 9* that underlies the module.

3. **Module Structure**: A set of thematic components or subtopics through which the module is explored.
4. **Training Activities**: Experiential learning exercises designed to translate philosophical insight into practical leadership awareness. These activities may include reflective journaling, ethical simulations, case-based discussions, and structured dialogue.
5. **Assessment and Evaluation**: Formative methods used to observe the development of ethical reasoning and decision-making capacity among participants.
6. **Limits of Performative Metrics**: A critical reflection on the inadequacy of conventional performance indicators for measuring ethical leadership formation.
7. **Criterion of Success**: Clear qualitative indicators that signal the emergence of ethical capacities such as moral independence, steadiness under pressure, and principled decision-making.
8. **Institutional Implications**: A discussion of how the ethical capacities developed through the module contribute to strengthening governance, trust, and institutional integrity within universities.

This structured approach ensures that the leadership training framework remains both philosophically grounded and practically applicable. The modules are designed not merely to communicate ethical concepts but to cultivate leadership dispositions capable of guiding institutional decision-making.

A central feature of the architecture is the emphasis on **formative rather than performative evaluation**. Ethical leadership formation cannot be adequately measured through conventional metrics such as productivity indicators, administrative outputs, or reputation scores. Instead, assessment must focus on the development of ethical reasoning patterns, consistency of judgment under pressure, and the capacity to act with integrity when institutional incentives encourage compromise. Consequently, the training model prioritizes reflective assessment methods that capture the developmental nature of ethical formation.

Equally important is the recognition that leadership formation occurs not only at the level of individual character but also within the broader institutional environment. Universities shape leadership behaviour through their reward structures, governance systems, and cultural norms. The training architecture therefore emphasizes the interaction between **individual ethical formation and institutional culture**. Leaders formed through this framework are expected not merely to exhibit personal integrity but also to cultivate institutional environments that support ethical governance and academic freedom.

The four modules described above collectively translate the philosophical insights of *Salok Mahalla 9* into a practical leadership formation framework for HEIs. By integrating existential awareness, ethical clarity, discernment, and ontological anchoring, the architecture provides a comprehensive approach to leadership development capable of addressing the ethical complexities of contemporary university governance.

The following sections elaborate each of these modules in detail, beginning with the first stage of leadership formation: the recognition of **impermanence and moral urgency through the lens of Kaal**.

9.4 Module I

Death, Impermanence, and Ethical Leadership in Higher Education

The first leadership formation module addresses the ethical insight that arises from the recognition of death and impermanence. Within *Salok Mahalla 9*, attributed to Guru Tegh Bahadur, the awareness of mortality functions not as a pessimistic reflection but as a profound ethical equalizer. By reminding individuals of the inevitable dissolution of worldly roles, identities, and attachments, this insight destabilizes the psychological foundations of fear-based decision-making.

In the context of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), leadership decisions are often shaped by anxieties related to position, reputation, career progression, and institutional recognition. These anxieties may encourage compromise, silence in the face of ethical concerns, or the prioritization of institutional prestige over academic integrity. The recognition of impermanence disrupts such attachments by placing institutional authority within a broader existential horizon.

This module therefore introduces **death-awareness as a formative ethical discipline**, enabling leaders to recognize the transitory nature of power, prestige, and professional identity. When leaders internalize this perspective, authority becomes stewardship rather than possession, and ethical judgment becomes less vulnerable to pressures arising from institutional status or personal ambition.

The pedagogical objective of this module is not to cultivate detachment from institutional responsibility but rather to free leadership judgment from the fear of losing position, recognition, or approval. Ethical clarity emerges when leaders recognize that authority is temporary, reputation is fragile, and moral accountability ultimately transcends institutional reward structures.

Module Objective

The objective of this module is to cultivate **existential awareness and moral courage** among higher education leaders by integrating reflection on death and impermanence into leadership formation.

Specifically, the module seeks to enable participants to:

- Recognize the transitory nature of authority, prestige, and institutional position
- Reduce fear-driven attachment to leadership roles and identities
- Strengthen ethical independence in decision-making
- Cultivate humility and responsibility in the exercise of academic authority
- Develop moral urgency regarding ethical governance and institutional integrity

By situating leadership within the horizon of impermanence, the module prepares leaders to act with clarity and courage even when ethical decisions involve personal or professional cost.

Module Structure

The module is organized around **seven interrelated components**, each addressing a particular dimension of ethical formation that emerges from awareness of death and impermanence.

1. Death as Ethical Equalizer

This component introduces the central philosophical insight that death dissolves distinctions of status, rank, and authority. Reflection on mortality reveals the temporary nature of institutional power and exposes the illusion of permanence that often accompanies leadership roles.

Training activities include reflective dialogue and philosophical discussion on mortality, authority, and responsibility within academic institutions. Participants examine how awareness of impermanence reshapes leadership priorities and ethical commitments.

Outcome: Leaders begin to perceive authority as temporary stewardship rather than personal entitlement.

2. Detachment from Role and Identity

Academic leadership positions frequently become intertwined with personal identity. This component examines how attachment to titles, roles, and institutional recognition can compromise ethical judgment.

Through guided reflection and case-based analysis, participants explore situations in which leaders become reluctant to challenge unethical practices because doing so threatens their role or institutional standing.

Outcome: Leaders develop greater freedom to exercise ethical judgment independent of role-based identity.

3. Ethical Independence from Relationships

Institutional decisions are often influenced by relational loyalties, alliances, or expectations of reciprocity. This component examines how such relational dynamics may compromise ethical independence.

Participants engage in scenario-based discussions exploring tensions between ethical principle and relational loyalty within university governance.

Outcome: Leaders cultivate the capacity to maintain ethical integrity even when relationships create pressure toward compromise.

4. Ego, Prestige, and Scholarly Humility

Academic institutions frequently reward prestige, seniority, and reputation. While recognition may reflect scholarly achievement, attachment to prestige can also generate ethical blind spots.

This component encourages leaders to examine how ego and recognition influence decision-making. Reflective exercises focus on humility as an essential dimension of ethical leadership.

Outcome: Leaders develop greater self-awareness regarding the influence of prestige and recognition on ethical perception.

5. Impermanence as Moral Urgency

Recognition of death not only dissolves attachment but also creates a sense of urgency regarding ethical responsibility. When leaders acknowledge the finite nature of time and opportunity, ethical action becomes more immediate and meaningful.

Participants reflect on how awareness of impermanence can motivate courageous decision-making and prevent moral procrastination.

Outcome: Leadership decisions become guided by ethical urgency rather than institutional convenience.

6. Preparation and Ethical Readiness

This component emphasizes the importance of continuous ethical preparedness. Because institutional crises often arise unexpectedly, leaders must cultivate ethical clarity before moments of pressure emerge.

Participants analyze historical and contemporary leadership cases where ethical readiness—or its absence—shaped institutional outcomes.

Outcome: Leaders learn to view ethical formation as ongoing preparation rather than reactive response.

7. Naam as Inner Anchoring

The final component introduces the concept of **Naam as inner anchoring**, a state of interior steadiness that enables leaders to remain ethically grounded despite institutional uncertainty.

While the full exploration of Naam is addressed in Module IV, this component introduces the concept as a stabilizing force that prevents awareness of death from producing despair or withdrawal. Instead, awareness of impermanence becomes integrated with inward moral clarity.

Outcome: Leaders recognize that ethical courage requires inner grounding beyond institutional approval or recognition.

Assessment and Evaluation

Leadership formation in this module is assessed through **formative and developmental methods** that capture ethical growth across time rather than isolated performance indicators.

Formative Assessment

Ethical leadership development is evaluated through longitudinal observation and reflective practices that emphasize growth in ethical awareness and judgment.
Recommended assessment methods include:

- Reflective leadership journals documenting ethical insights and decision-making challenges
- Scenario-based ethical simulations involving institutional pressure
- Peer dialogue and collaborative reflection
- Longitudinal observation of leadership reasoning patterns

Assessment focuses not merely on declared values but on the **consistency with which ethical reasoning informs leadership decisions**.

Limits of Performative Metrics

Traditional evaluation systems within universities often rely on metrics such as administrative outputs, productivity indicators, or reputation scores. While useful for assessing institutional performance, these metrics are poorly suited for evaluating ethical leadership formation.
Performative indicators frequently reward symbolic compliance rather than moral courage. Leaders may demonstrate adherence to formal procedures while avoiding difficult ethical decisions that involve personal or institutional risk.
Consequently, this module explicitly recognizes the **limitations of performative evaluation mechanisms** and emphasizes the need for assessment frameworks that prioritize ethical judgment under pressure.

Formative Assessment	Performative Metrics
Longitudinal	Event-based
Observed under pressure	Self-reported
Developmental	Symbolic
Behaviour-focused	Output-focused

Table 1: Assessing Ethical Leadership

This distinction highlights the difference between **ethical formation and performative compliance**. Whereas performative metrics capture visible outputs or declarations, formative assessment examines how leaders actually reason and act when confronted with ethical dilemmas.

Criterion of Success

Success within this module is not measured by verbal affirmation of ethical principles but by **consistent ethical behaviour under conditions of pressure or uncertainty**.
Indicators of successful leadership formation include:

- Reduced fear of positional loss in ethical decision-making
- Increased willingness to dissent when institutional integrity is compromised
- Demonstrated humility in the exercise of authority

- Consistency of ethical reasoning across different institutional contexts
- Capacity to prioritize academic integrity over reputational advantage

Ultimately, the central criterion of success is **ethical steadiness when institutional incentives encourage compromise**.

Assessment Dimension	Formative Assessment Method	Leadership Capacity Evaluated	Institutional Indicator
Reflective awareness of impermanence	Guided reflective journals on death, impermanence, and leadership responsibility	Existential awareness and moral seriousness in leadership	Evidence of thoughtful engagement with ethical responsibilities beyond personal career advancement
Courage in ethical decision-making	Scenario-based ethical simulations involving institutional pressure and risk	Moral courage and willingness to act despite personal or professional risk	Demonstrated readiness to prioritise ethical principles over institutional expediency
Ability to confront fear-driven leadership	Structured peer dialogue on fear, insecurity, and authority in academic governance	Emotional maturity and leadership resilience	Reduction of fear-driven decision-making and increased openness in leadership dialogue
Ethical self-awareness	Personal leadership reflection essays analysing motivations for authority and leadership	Self-reflective leadership identity	Leaders articulate ethical purpose beyond status, prestige, or administrative power
Commitment to institutional responsibility	Facilitated discussion of real governance cases involving ethical dilemmas	Responsibility toward institutional integrity	Participants demonstrate recognition of long-term institutional consequences of leadership decisions

Table 2: Formative Assessment Framework for Module I: Death, Impermanence, and Ethical Leadership

The purpose of this assessment framework is not to generate numerical scores but to identify the emergence of ethical awareness in leadership practice. By confronting the reality of impermanence, leaders begin to recognise the fragility of power, status, and institutional authority. This awareness can cultivate a form of leadership that is less driven by fear of loss and more oriented toward responsibility, integrity, and long-term institutional stewardship.

Institutional Implications

Integrating this module into leadership development programs within Higher Education Institutions carries significant institutional implications.

- First, awareness of impermanence can weaken cultures of fear that often discourage ethical dissent within universities. When leaders recognize that positions and

reputations are temporary, they may be more willing to protect academic freedom and institutional integrity.

- Second, leadership training that emphasizes existential awareness encourages humility in the exercise of authority. This can contribute to governance cultures that prioritize stewardship rather than hierarchy.
- Third, by cultivating ethical independence from prestige and recognition, the module can help institutions reduce performative behaviour that prioritizes visibility over substance.
- Finally, the module offers a **non-sectarian ethical framework** grounded in philosophical reflection rather than doctrinal instruction. The insights derived from the teachings of Guru Tegh Bahadur can therefore be integrated into diverse academic contexts while contributing to globally relevant conversations about ethical leadership and institutional integrity.

9.5 Module II

From Illusion to Integrity: Māyā and Ethical Leadership Formation in Universities

The second leadership formation module addresses the ethical distortions produced by illusion, attachment, and the pursuit of institutional prestige. In *Salok Mahalla 9*, attributed to Guru Tegh Bahadur, the concept of **Māyā** does not merely refer to metaphysical illusion but to the pervasive tendency of human beings to mistake appearances for reality and temporary gains for enduring value.

Within contemporary Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), Māyā manifests through institutional structures that reward visibility, prestige, reputation, and quantitative metrics of success. While these indicators often serve legitimate administrative purposes, they may also produce subtle distortions of ethical judgment. Leaders may become attached to rankings, symbolic recognition, or narratives of institutional success in ways that obscure ethical responsibility and academic integrity.

This module therefore examines Māyā as a **form of ethical distortion operating within institutional life**. It explores how attachment to prestige, productivity metrics, recognition, and institutional narratives can influence leadership decisions and create environments in which appearance is rewarded over integrity.

The pedagogical goal of this module is not to reject institutional success or professional recognition. Rather, it seeks to cultivate leaders capable of **recognizing illusion while remaining fully engaged in institutional responsibility**. When leaders learn to distinguish between symbolic success and ethical substance, institutional governance becomes more transparent, impartial, and trustworthy.

In the leadership formation sequence proposed in this chapter, the recognition of Māyā follows the existential awareness cultivated in Module I. If awareness of impermanence weakens fear-based attachment to authority, the recognition of Māyā exposes the **mechanisms through which illusion sustains those attachments**. Together, these insights prepare leaders for the deeper ethical capacities developed in the subsequent modules.

Module Objective

The objective of this module is to cultivate **ethically independent leaders and teachers capable of resisting illusion, performative success, and attachment-driven compromise while remaining fully engaged in institutional responsibility**.

More specifically, the module seeks to enable participants to:

- Recognize how illusion operates through prestige, institutional narratives, and performance metrics
- Develop independence from approval, recognition, and symbolic compliance
- Distinguish ethical substance from institutional appearance
- Cultivate humility and vigilance against ego-driven decision-making
- Strengthen discernment when institutional incentives encourage compromise

By exposing the ethical distortions produced by Māyā, the module prepares leaders to exercise authority with clarity rather than attachment.

Module Structure

Seven Interrelated Components

The module is organized around **seven interrelated components** that collectively examine how illusion operates within institutional leadership and how ethical clarity may be cultivated in response.

1. Māyā as Ethical Distortion

This component introduces Māyā as a framework for understanding ethical distortion in institutional life. Illusion operates not merely through deception but through the **subtle conflation of appearance and value**.

Participants examine how prestige, institutional narratives, rankings, and performance metrics can create environments in which symbolic success overshadows ethical substance.

Outcome: Leaders learn to recognize when institutional incentives distort ethical judgment.

2. Detachment from Role, Rank, and Recognition

Academic leadership positions often become closely tied to personal identity and professional validation. This component explores how attachment to titles, roles, and recognition may compromise ethical independence.

Participants reflect on leadership situations where the desire for recognition or advancement influences decision-making.

Outcome: Leaders develop the capacity to exercise authority as stewardship rather than identity.

3. Ethical Independence from Relationships and Patronage

Institutional alliances, collegial loyalties, and patronage networks often influence governance decisions. While collaboration is essential for academic life, relational dependence may weaken ethical judgment.

Through case-based discussion and scenario analysis, participants examine situations where relational pressure conflicts with ethical responsibility.

Outcome: Leaders cultivate independence from relational expectations that compromise integrity.

4. Ego, Prestige, and Scholarly Humility

Academic environments frequently reward prestige and reputation. This component examines how ego and recognition may produce moral blind spots.

Participants engage in reflective dialogue on the relationship between scholarly accomplishment, humility, and ethical leadership.

Outcome: Leaders develop greater awareness of how prestige influences perception and decision-making.

5. Appearance versus Integrity in Institutional Life

This component examines the phenomenon of **performative ethics**, in which institutions publicly affirm ethical commitments while privately tolerating practices that contradict them.

Participants analyze institutional examples where symbolic compliance replaces substantive accountability.

Outcome: Leaders develop the ability to distinguish between ethical substance and institutional appearance.

6. Discernment (Bibek) as Leadership Competence

The recognition of Māyā naturally leads to the cultivation of **Bibek**, or ethical discernment. This component introduces discernment as the capacity to perceive ethical reality beyond institutional narratives or appearances.

Participants practice ethical decision-mapping exercises designed to clarify the difference between principled action and convenient compromise.

Outcome: Leaders develop the intellectual and moral clarity necessary to resist illusion.

7. Inner Anchoring beyond Māyā

The final component emphasizes the importance of inner grounding in sustaining ethical clarity. Without inward stability, awareness of illusion may produce cynicism or disengagement.

Participants reflect on practices that cultivate inward clarity and ethical steadiness in leadership roles.

Outcome: Leaders recognize that freedom from illusion requires inner anchoring rather than mere critique of institutional systems.

Assessment and Evaluation

Because Māyā operates precisely by rewarding appearances, evaluation mechanisms must avoid reproducing the very distortions the module seeks to address.

Assessment Dimension	Formative Ethical Assessment (Māyā-Aware)	Performative Metrics (Māyā-Reinforcing)	Why This Distinction Matters in the Context of Māyā
Underlying Purpose	Development of ethical discernment and inner freedom	Demonstration of compliance, success, or reputation	Māyā thrives when ethics are reduced to appearance rather than inner clarity
View of Ethical Leadership	A cultivated capacity requiring vigilance and growth	A static trait inferred from indicators or titles	Illusion converts ethical leadership into a label rather than a practice
Primary Focus	Quality of judgment under pressure and ambiguity	Quantity of reported actions, outputs, or symbols	Māyā rewards visibility; ethics require substance
Time Horizon	Longitudinal and developmental	Episodic and event-based	Ethical clarity is revealed over time, not in isolated moments
Assessment Methods	Reflective journals, ethical simulations, peer dialogue, observation	Surveys, compliance checklists, rankings, self-reports	Performative tools often reward strategic self-presentation
Response to Ambiguity	Examines how leaders navigate moral uncertainty	Avoids ambiguity by standardizing responses	Māyā operates most strongly in ambiguous institutional spaces
Treatment of Failure	Viewed as a site for ethical learning and humility	Concealed to preserve image or metrics	Illusion depends on hiding vulnerability
Role of Prestige and Status	Actively bracketed during evaluation	Often implicitly rewarded	Māyā binds ethics to recognition and rank
Relation to Relationships and Power	Assesses ethical independence from alliances	Rarely examines relational pressures	Attachment to networks is a central ethical distortion
Incentive Structure	Encourages courage, honesty, and discernment	Encourages conformity and risk-avoidance	Māyā aligns with safety, not truth
Outcome Measured	Consistency of ethical action across contexts	Successful appearance of ethical behaviour	Māyā survives when appearance substitutes for integrity

Institutional Effect	Builds cultures of trust and moral clarity	Reinforces symbolic compliance and silence	Ethical institutions require freedom from illusion
Criterion of Success	Integrity maintained despite loss or cost	Recognition, reward, or reputational gain	Ethical leadership begins where reward ends

Table 3. Assessing Ethical Leadership in Higher Education: Formative Assessment versus Performative Metrics in the Context of Māyā

Formative and Developmental Assessment

Assessment within this module focuses on **longitudinal ethical formation** rather than episodic compliance.

Recommended methods include:

- Reflective ethical journals documenting decision-making tensions
- Scenario-based simulations involving ambiguous ethical dilemmas
- Peer dialogue and feedback focused on ethical discernment
- Observation of decision consistency across time and institutional contexts

Evaluation therefore examines **patterns of ethical reasoning rather than isolated declarations of value**.

Limits of Performative Metrics

Conventional evaluation tools—such as self-assessment surveys, compliance checklists, or reputation indices—often reinforce the dynamics of Māyā by rewarding symbolic affirmation rather than ethical courage. Such metrics may capture visibility or productivity but fail to reveal whether leaders act with integrity when confronted with institutional pressure.

Consequently, this framework explicitly recognizes the **limitations of metric-dominant evaluation systems** and emphasizes assessment mechanisms capable of observing ethical behaviour under real conditions of uncertainty.

Formative Assessment	Performative Metrics
Longitudinal observation of ethical conduct	Event-based measurement
Decision-making under pressure	Self-reported ethical attitudes
Developmental ethical reasoning	Symbolic compliance
Behaviour-focused evaluation	Output-focused indicators

Table 4: Assessing Ethical Leadership in Higher Education: Formative Assessment versus Performative Metrics in the Context of Māyā

This distinction highlights the difference between **ethical formation and institutional performance signalling**.

Criterion of Success

Success within a Māyā-informed leadership framework is not defined by visibility, approval, or institutional reward.

The **primary criterion of success** is:
Consistency of ethical judgment and action when ethical integrity conflicts with personal, relational, or institutional advantage.

Secondary indicators include:

- Willingness to accept reputational or positional cost
- Capacity to dissent without hostility or withdrawal
- Resistance to symbolic compliance when substance is compromised
- Sustained ethical clarity under ambiguity and institutional pressure

Ultimately, ethical leadership is demonstrated not through affirmation of values but through **the ability to act upon those values when doing so carries risk**.

Institutional Implications

The analysis of Māyā carries important implications for leadership development within Higher Education Institutions.

- First, leadership training frameworks must move beyond compliance-based models and incorporate **ethical discernment as a core leadership competence**. Procedural adherence alone cannot protect institutions from illusion when leaders remain attached to prestige, recognition, or institutional narratives of success.
- Second, institutional cultures must reduce reliance on symbolic compliance and performative ethics. When universities reward visibility and reputation without examining ethical substance, they inadvertently reproduce the dynamics of Māyā.
- Third, governance systems must actively protect **ethical independence from relational pressure**. Policies that support principled dissent and protect whistle-blowers can help ensure that leaders are not forced to choose between ethical integrity and institutional belonging.
- Finally, the insights derived from the teachings of Guru Tegh Bahadur provide a **non-sectarian philosophical framework** that can strengthen conversations about ethical leadership in universities worldwide.

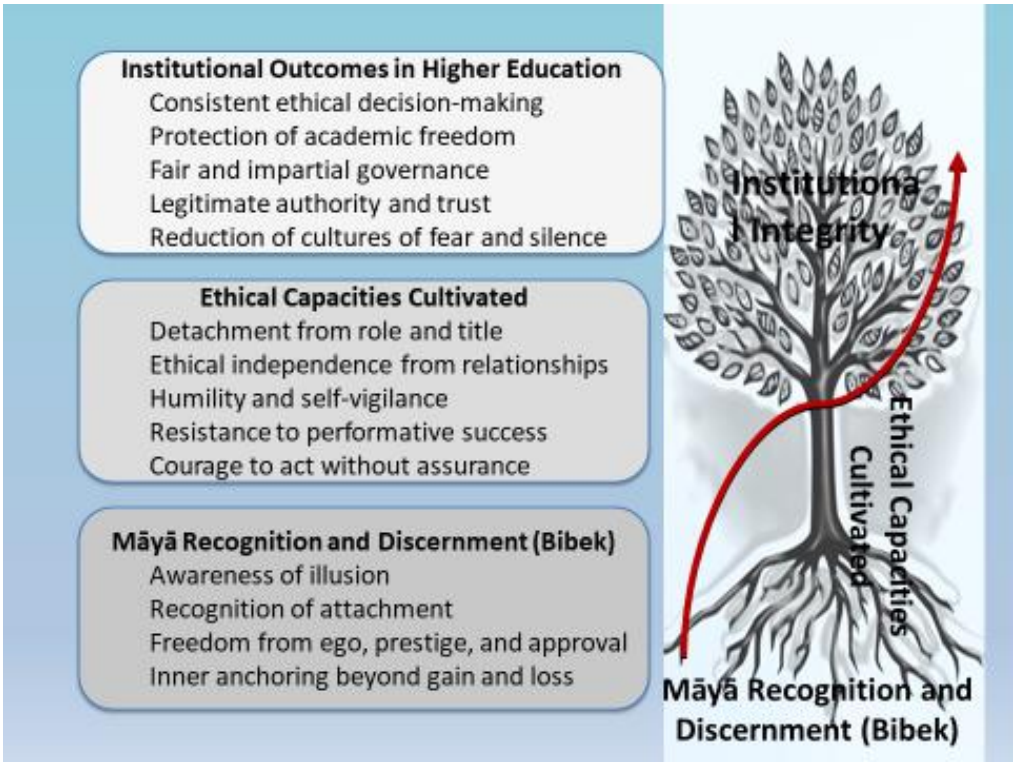


Figure 1 Ethical Leadership as a Process of Inner Formation Leading to Institutional Integrity: A Māyā-Based Framework

Conceptual Architecture (Vertical Flow Model: Inner → Relational → Institutional)

This figure conceptualizes ethical leadership as an **inward–outward developmental process** in which recognition of Māyā produces discernment and inner freedom.

Roots – Inner Formation

- Recognition of illusion and attachment
- Awareness of ego, prestige, and approval-seeking
- Discernment (Bibek) emerging from ethical clarity
- Inner anchoring beyond gain and loss

Ethical clarity originates here.

Stem – Ethical Capacities

- Detachment from role and title
- Ethical independence from relationships
- Humility and self-vigilance
- Resistance to performative success
- Courage to act without assurance

Ethical judgment stabilizes here.

Branches and Leaves – Institutional Integrity

- Consistent ethical decision-making
- Protection of academic freedom
- Fair and impartial governance

- Legitimate authority and trust
- Reduction of cultures of fear and silence

Institutional integrity emerges here.

Directional Logic of the Model

- Ethical formation moves from inner clarity to institutional practice.
- Integrity cannot be imposed through compliance but must arise from ethical leadership formation.
- Institutions that reward integrity reinforce the ethical clarity of leaders through a positive feedback loop.

By framing ethical leadership as liberation from illusion rather than adherence to ideology, this framework contributes to a globally relevant model of leadership formation grounded in clarity, discernment, and moral independence.

Integrative Insight

If **Kaal** reveals the impermanence of institutional forms, **Māyā** reveals the illusions that bind leaders to those forms.

Ethical leadership therefore requires liberation from both:

- **Urgency without fear** (through awareness of impermanence)
- **Engagement without attachment** (through recognition of illusion)

When leaders become inwardly free from illusion, institutional integrity becomes possible.

9.6 Module III

Detachment and Ethical Discernment (Bibek / Vairāg) as Leadership Capacity: Formation of Institutional Integrity in Higher Education

The third module of the leadership formation architecture introduces **Bibek (ethical discernment) and Vairāg (detachment)** as the stabilizing capacities that enable leaders to act with integrity once the distortions of fear and illusion have been recognized. If the first module reveals the ethical urgency arising from the awareness of impermanence, and the second exposes the illusions that shape institutional life, the present module focuses on the **development of disciplined ethical judgment**.

Within the teachings of Guru Tegh Bahadur, discernment and detachment are not abstract virtues but practical capacities that allow individuals to perceive ethical reality clearly and to act without being dominated by attachment to outcomes. Discernment clarifies what is ethically right, while detachment protects that clarity from being compromised by personal interest, relational pressure, or institutional incentives.

In contemporary universities, leaders frequently encounter complex ethical situations where competing interests, ambiguous policies, and institutional expectations create uncertainty regarding the right course of action. Without discernment, leaders may struggle to identify the ethical dimensions of such situations. Without detachment, they may recognize the ethical course of action but hesitate to follow it due to fear of consequences.

This module therefore develops Bibek and Vairāg as **core leadership competencies**. Discernment equips leaders to perceive ethical truth beyond institutional narratives, while detachment provides the moral independence necessary to act upon that truth. Together, these capacities transform ethical insight into principled leadership practice.

1 Module Objective

The objective of this module is to cultivate **ethical discernment and principled detachment as essential leadership capacities within Higher Education Institutions**.

The module seeks to enable participants to:

- Recognize ethical dilemmas embedded within institutional processes
- Develop disciplined reasoning for complex leadership decisions
- Strengthen independence from personal or institutional attachment
- Cultivate fairness and impartiality in governance
- Stabilize ethical judgment under conditions of pressure and uncertainty

Through these capacities, leaders become capable of exercising authority guided by principle rather than convenience.

2 Module Structure

Seven Components of Bibek / Vairāg Leadership Formation

1. Ethical Discernment as Leadership Competence

This component introduces Bibek as the intellectual and moral capacity to distinguish between ethical substance and superficial appearance. Leaders examine case studies in which institutional narratives obscure ethical reality.

Outcome: Leaders strengthen their ability to identify ethical dimensions within complex administrative decisions.

2. Detachment from Personal Interest

Detachment (Vairāg) allows leaders to recognize when personal interest, ambition, or insecurity influences judgment.

Participants engage in reflective analysis exploring how personal motivations affect leadership decisions.

Outcome: Leaders develop greater awareness of the relationship between attachment and ethical compromise.

3. Discernment in Institutional Decision-Making

This component examines the application of ethical discernment within university governance, including hiring, resource allocation, academic evaluation, and disciplinary processes.
Outcome: Leaders develop structured reasoning approaches for resolving institutional ethical dilemmas.

4. Detachment from Outcome Anxiety

Leadership decisions often involve uncertainty regarding their consequences. Attachment to particular outcomes may distort judgment.
Through scenario-based exercises, participants practice making principled decisions despite uncertainty.
Outcome: Leaders learn to act according to principle rather than anticipated reward or approval.

5. Impartiality and Justice

Bibek and Vairāg together cultivate fairness in institutional governance. Detachment allows leaders to resist favoritism, patronage, or bias.
Outcome: Leaders strengthen their capacity to exercise impartial authority.

6. Ethical Courage under Institutional Pressure

Discernment without courage is insufficient for ethical leadership. This component examines how leaders can sustain ethical judgment in the face of institutional pressure.
Outcome: Leaders develop resilience when confronted with opposition or institutional resistance.

7. Integration with Inner Anchoring

The final component emphasizes that discernment and detachment require inner stability. Ethical judgment must ultimately be anchored in a deeper sense of purpose and identity.
Outcome: Leaders recognize that ethical clarity must be sustained by inward grounding, which will be explored further in the next module.

3 Assessment and Evaluation

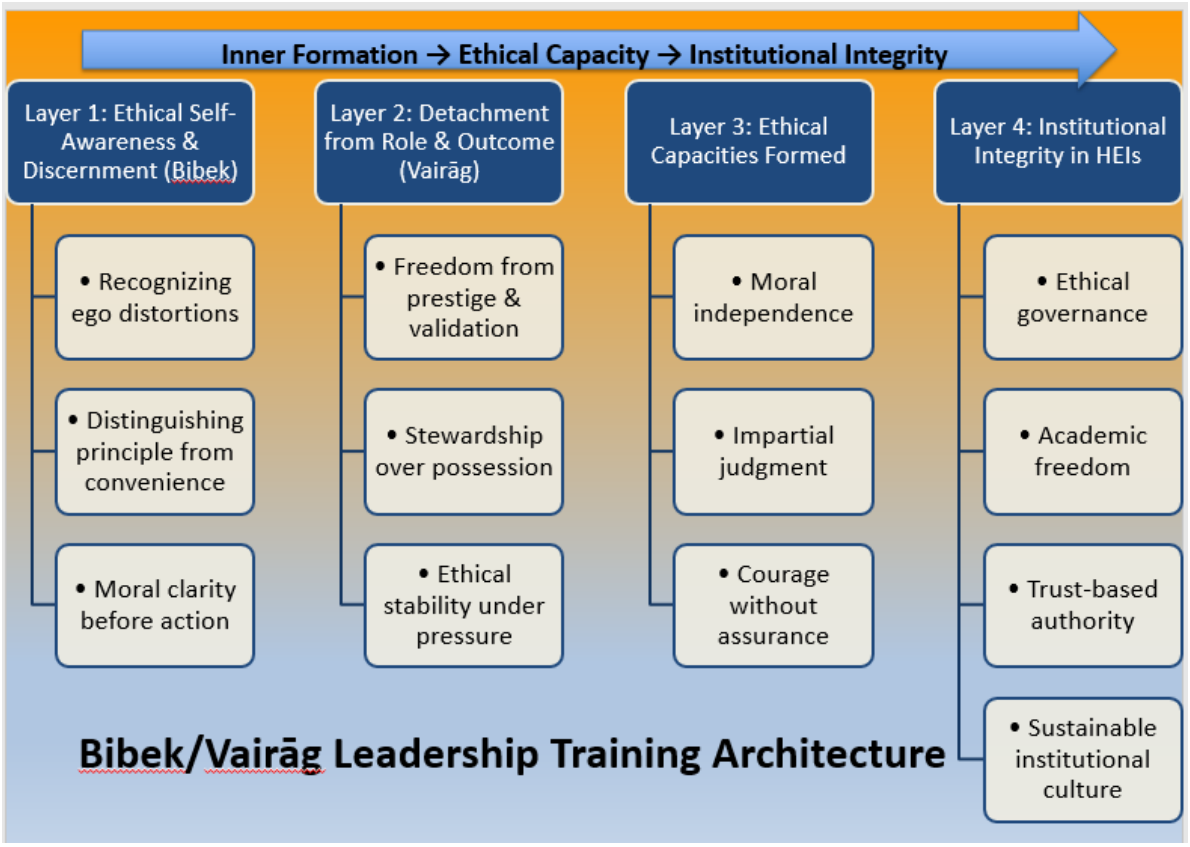
Evaluation within this module focuses on the development of **ethical reasoning and decision-making capacity**.

4 Formative Assessment

Recommended assessment methods include:

- Ethical decision-analysis exercises
- Scenario-based leadership simulations
- Peer dialogue and ethical reasoning workshops
- Reflective journals documenting leadership dilemmas

Assessment focuses on the **quality of ethical reasoning rather than rhetorical affirmation of values**.



"Integrity is not enforced but emerges from ethically formed leadership."

Figure 2. Bibek/Vairāg Leadership Training Architecture: From Inner Formation to Institutional Integrity

Formation-Oriented Assessment	Performative Indicators
Analysis of ethical reasoning	Output-based administrative metrics
Decision-making simulations	Institutional productivity indicators
Peer review of ethical judgment	Self-reported leadership values
Longitudinal observation of governance behaviour	Event-based recognition

Table 5: Evaluating Ethical Discernment in Leadership Formation

5 Limits of Performative Evaluation

Institutional leadership is often evaluated through measurable outputs such as administrative productivity or institutional ranking. While useful for operational evaluation, these indicators do not capture the development of ethical discernment.

Performative evaluation may therefore overlook the most significant aspect of leadership formation: the **capacity to reason ethically under complex conditions**.

6 Criterion of Success

The success of this module is measured through the **consistency and clarity of ethical reasoning in leadership decisions**.

Indicators include:

- Demonstrated ability to analyze ethical dilemmas
- Independence from personal or institutional attachment
- Fairness and impartiality in decision-making
- Courage in defending ethical positions

Ultimately, success is reflected in **leaders whose decisions remain principled even when circumstances encourage compromise**.

Assessment Dimension	Formative Assessment Method	Leadership Capacity Evaluated	Institutional Indicator
Ethical discernment in complex situations	Case-based ethical reasoning exercises involving competing institutional interests	Ability to distinguish ethical responsibility from institutional convenience	Evidence of principled decision-making in complex governance contexts
Detachment from prestige and positional authority	Reflective writing on ambition, status, and leadership identity	Capacity for non-attached leadership and resistance to ego-driven authority	Reduced emphasis on personal recognition in leadership decisions
Moral independence in institutional decision-making	Simulated governance deliberations requiring ethical judgment under pressure	Integrity in decision-making despite institutional or peer pressure	Leaders demonstrate willingness to dissent from unethical institutional practices
Balanced judgment in policy and governance	Peer evaluation of decision-making processes in simulated academic leadership scenarios	Prudence and balanced ethical reasoning	Institutional decisions reflect careful ethical consideration rather than reactive administrative responses
Commitment to institutional integrity	Group reflection on historical or contemporary governance failures in universities	Awareness of ethical consequences of leadership actions	Recognition of leadership responsibility for protecting institutional trust and legitim

Table 6: Formative Assessment Framework for Module III: Bibek/Vairāg Leadership Formation

The formative assessment framework for the Bibek/Vairāg module evaluates the development of ethical discernment and detachment in leadership practice. Unlike conventional leadership

training that emphasises managerial efficiency, this assessment focuses on the capacity of leaders to exercise independent ethical judgment even when institutional pressures encourage conformity. Through case analysis, reflective exercises, and peer deliberation, participants are encouraged to cultivate a form of leadership grounded in discernment rather than ambition, and in responsibility rather than authority. Such leadership contributes directly to the strengthening of institutional integrity within higher education.

7 Institutional Implications

Developing Bibek and Vairāg within leadership training programs can significantly strengthen governance within universities.

First, ethical discernment enables leaders to recognize institutional risks before they escalate into crises. Second, detachment reduces the influence of patronage, prestige, and relational pressure on administrative decision-making.

Institutions that cultivate discernment and detachment among leaders are therefore more likely to maintain **transparent governance, academic freedom, and public trust**.

9.7 Module IV

From Fear to Freedom: Naam as the Culminating Principle of Ethical Leadership Formation

The final module of the leadership formation framework introduces **Naam as the culminating principle of ethical leadership formation**. While the previous modules cultivate awareness of impermanence, recognition of illusion, and development of discernment, this final stage addresses the deeper question of **inner grounding**.

Within the teachings attributed to Guru Tegh Bahadur, Naam represents a state of **interior anchoring in truth and moral clarity**. It is not merely a devotional practice but an ontological orientation that stabilizes human consciousness beyond fear, attachment, and illusion.

For leadership within Higher Education Institutions, Naam represents the **state of moral freedom** in which leaders act with integrity because their identity is no longer dependent on institutional reward, recognition, or security. Such leaders exercise authority as a form of stewardship rather than personal possession.

This module therefore represents the culmination of the leadership formation sequence. Whereas earlier modules address external distortions and ethical capacities, this final stage focuses on the **inner grounding that sustains ethical leadership across time**.

1 Module Objective

The objective of this module is to cultivate **interior steadiness and moral freedom as the foundation of responsible leadership**.

Participants will learn to:

- Develop inward clarity beyond institutional pressure
- Maintain ethical steadiness during uncertainty or crisis
- Align leadership identity with moral responsibility rather than prestige
- Integrate ethical insight with sustained institutional stewardship

2 Module Structure

Seven Components of Naam-Centered Leadership

1. Inner Anchoring and Leadership Identity

Leaders explore how inward grounding shapes ethical behaviour.
Outcome: Leadership identity becomes independent of external recognition.

2. Freedom from Fear

Naam dissolves fear arising from loss of position or reputation.
Outcome: Leaders act with courage when ethical principles are challenged.

3. Steadiness in Crisis

Inner anchoring allows leaders to remain calm during institutional crises.
Outcome: Leadership decisions remain principled under pressure.

4. Non-Performative Integrity

Naam transforms leadership from symbolic compliance into genuine ethical commitment.
Outcome: Leaders prioritize substance over appearance.

5. Responsibility and Stewardship

Leadership becomes an act of stewardship rather than personal advancement.
Outcome: Authority is exercised with humility and responsibility.

6. Moral Freedom

Naam liberates leaders from attachment to gain or fear of loss.
Outcome: Ethical judgment becomes consistent and fearless.

7. Institutional Trust and Legitimacy

Inner integrity ultimately shapes institutional culture.
Outcome: Universities led by ethically grounded leaders develop trust and legitimacy.

3 Assessment and Evaluation

Evaluation within this module focuses on **long-term consistency of ethical leadership behaviour**.

4 Formative Assessment

Methods include:

- longitudinal observation of leadership conduct
- reflective ethical narratives
- peer leadership dialogue
- institutional case reflection

5 Limits of Performative Evaluation

Moral freedom cannot be measured through numerical indicators or reputation metrics. Ethical integrity reveals itself primarily through **consistency of behaviour across time and circumstances**.

Formation-Oriented Assessment	Performative Indicators
Long-term ethical consistency	Reputation or visibility metrics
Behaviour under crisis	Institutional popularity
Integrity across contexts	Public declarations of values
Stewardship-oriented leadership	Career advancement indicators

Table 7: Evaluating Moral Freedom in Leadership Formation

Assessment Dimension	Formative Assessment Method	Leadership Capacity Evaluated	Institutional Indicator
Interior moral anchoring	Longitudinal reflective journals on leadership responsibility and ethical purpose	Stability of ethical orientation independent of external rewards or pressures	Leaders demonstrate consistency in ethical reasoning across changing institutional contexts
Integrity in leadership practice	Evaluation of responses to simulated ethical crises involving institutional risk	Courage to act in accordance with moral conviction	Leaders prioritise institutional integrity even when facing reputational or political consequences
Ethical steadiness under pressure	Role-play scenarios involving competing institutional demands	Inner steadiness and moral composure	Decision-making reflects calm and principled judgment rather than reactive leadership
Commitment to the common good	Group reflection on leadership responsibilities toward students, faculty, and society	Sense of stewardship in institutional leadership	Leaders articulate a vision of universities as ethical communities rather than bureaucratic organisations
Integration of ethical formation	Final reflective essay on leadership identity and moral responsibility	Internalisation of ethical leadership principles	Participants demonstrate an integrated understanding of leadership as service and responsibility

Table 8: Formative Assessment Framework for Module IV: Naam and Moral Freedom

6 Criterion of Success

The success of this module is indicated by leaders who demonstrate:

- ethical steadiness across time

- freedom from fear or attachment
- consistent integrity in institutional governance
- humility and stewardship in leadership roles

The formative assessment framework for this module focuses on the emergence of interior moral anchoring in leadership practice. Whereas earlier modules cultivate awareness, critical reflection, and ethical discernment, this final stage seeks to evaluate the integration of these capacities into a stable ethical orientation. Leadership grounded in such interior steadiness is less vulnerable to institutional pressures, reputational anxieties, or personal ambition. Instead, it reflects a form of moral freedom in which leaders are able to act responsibly and courageously in service of institutional integrity and the broader public good.

7 Institutional Implications

When leadership formation reaches this stage, the benefits extend beyond individual character to institutional culture.

Universities led by morally grounded leaders are more likely to sustain **academic freedom, transparent governance, and public trust**. Such institutions cultivate environments where ethical responsibility becomes integral to scholarly life rather than an external requirement.

Thus, the progression from **Kaal to Māyā to Bibek/Vairāg and finally to Naam** represents not only an ethical journey for individuals but also a framework for **renewing institutional integrity within Higher Education Institutions**.

9.8 Integrated Assessment Framework for the Four Leadership Formation Modules in Higher Education

Leadership Module	Ethical Capacity Developed	Formative Assessment Approach	Institutional Indicator
Module I – Kaal (Death and Impermanence)	Existential awareness and moral courage; freedom from fear of positional loss	Reflective leadership journals on ethical dilemmas; scenario-based simulations involving institutional pressure; peer dialogue examining fear and authority	Leaders demonstrate willingness to defend academic integrity even when personal or professional cost is involved
Module II – Māyā (Illusion and Ethical Distortion)	Ethical clarity and independence from prestige, recognition, and performative success	Ethical decision-mapping exercises; analysis of institutional case studies involving symbolic compliance; reflective discussions	Reduction of performative behaviour; increased transparency and substance-based

		on appearance vs integrity	governance decisions
Module III – Bibek / Vairāg (Discernment and Detachment)	Ethical discernment, impartiality, and principled decision-making under complexity	Structured ethical reasoning exercises; peer review of governance decisions; simulation of complex institutional dilemmas	Fair and impartial governance practices; consistency of decisions across institutional contexts
Module IV – Naam (Ontological Anchoring and Moral Freedom)	Interior steadiness, moral freedom, and stewardship-oriented leadership	Longitudinal observation of leadership conduct; reflective narratives on ethical leadership identity; peer dialogue on moral responsibility	Institutional cultures characterized by trust, legitimacy, academic freedom, and ethical stability

Table 9. Integrated Assessment Framework for the Four Leadership Formation Modules in Higher Education

This Table synthesises the assessment architecture of the four leadership modules developed in this chapter. Rather than evaluating leadership through narrow managerial metrics, the framework emphasises the progressive cultivation of ethical capacities. Beginning with existential awareness of impermanence, the model moves through critical recognition of institutional illusion, the development of ethical discernment and detachment, and culminates in a form of moral freedom grounded in interior steadiness. This integrated framework demonstrates how leadership formation within higher education institutions can be approached as a process of ethical development rather than merely administrative training.

Conceptual Significance of the Framework

This integrated framework demonstrates that **ethical leadership formation unfolds as a developmental progression**.

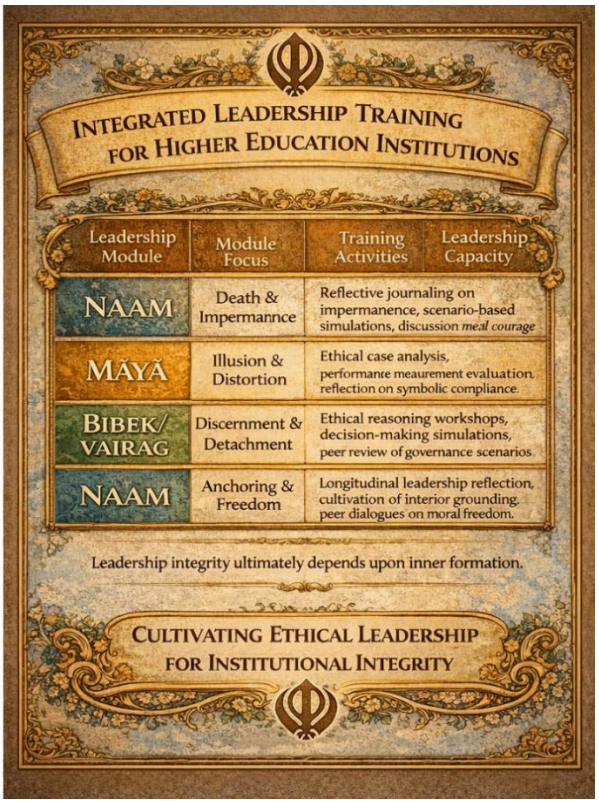
Stage	Leadership Transformation
Kaal	Leaders become free from fear
Māyā	Leaders become free from illusion
Bibek / Vairāg	Leaders develop ethical discernment
Naam	Leaders achieve moral freedom and inner steadiness

The framework therefore reflects the philosophical insights articulated in the teachings attributed to Guru Tegh Bahadur while translating them into a **practical leadership training architecture for universities**.

Pedagogical Value for Higher Education Institutions

The table performs several important functions within the leadership training model.

- First, it clarifies the **relationship between ethical formation and institutional outcomes**. Leadership development is not merely a matter of individual character; it shapes the ethical culture of the institution itself.
- Second, the framework distinguishes **formative assessment from performative evaluation**. Ethical leadership cannot be adequately captured through conventional administrative metrics. Instead, the framework emphasizes developmental observation, ethical reasoning, and behaviour under pressure.
- Third, it allows leadership development programs within universities to **align training activities with institutional indicators of success**, ensuring that ethical formation contributes directly to improved governance, academic freedom, and institutional trust.

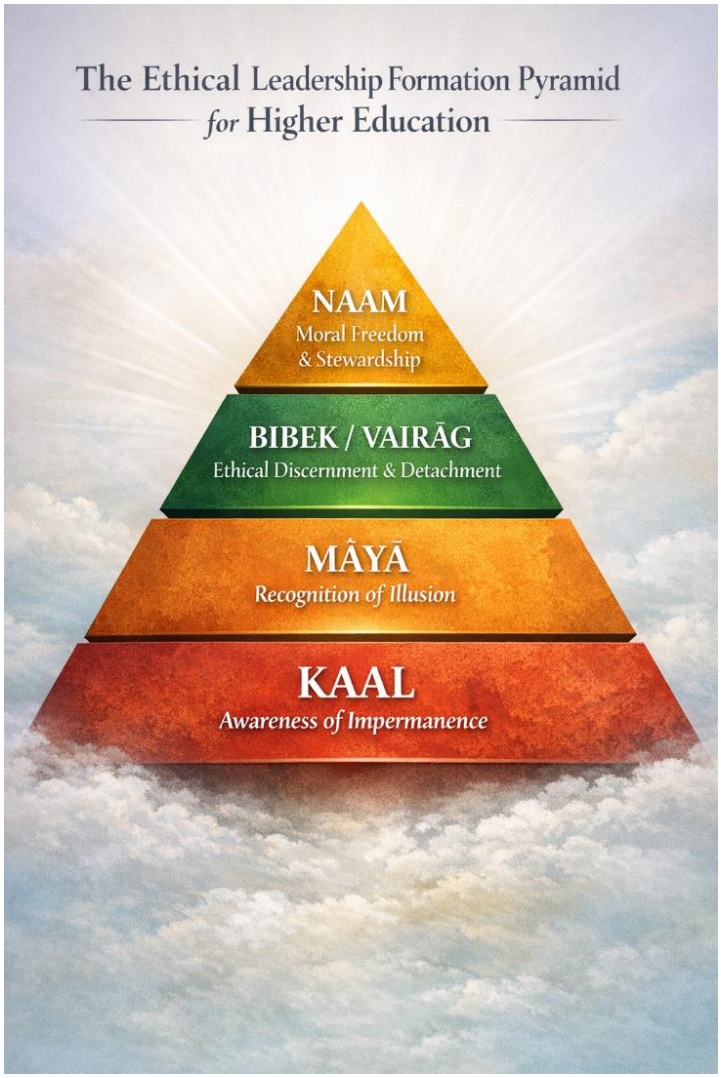


This table synthesizes the leadership training architecture derived from *Salok Mahalla 9*. Each module cultivates a distinct ethical capacity—freedom from fear (Kaal), liberation from illusion (Māyā), disciplined discernment (Bibek/Vairāg), and moral freedom (Naam). Together, these capacities form a comprehensive framework for leadership development within Higher Education Institutions, linking formative assessment practices with institutional indicators of ethical governance.

Summary

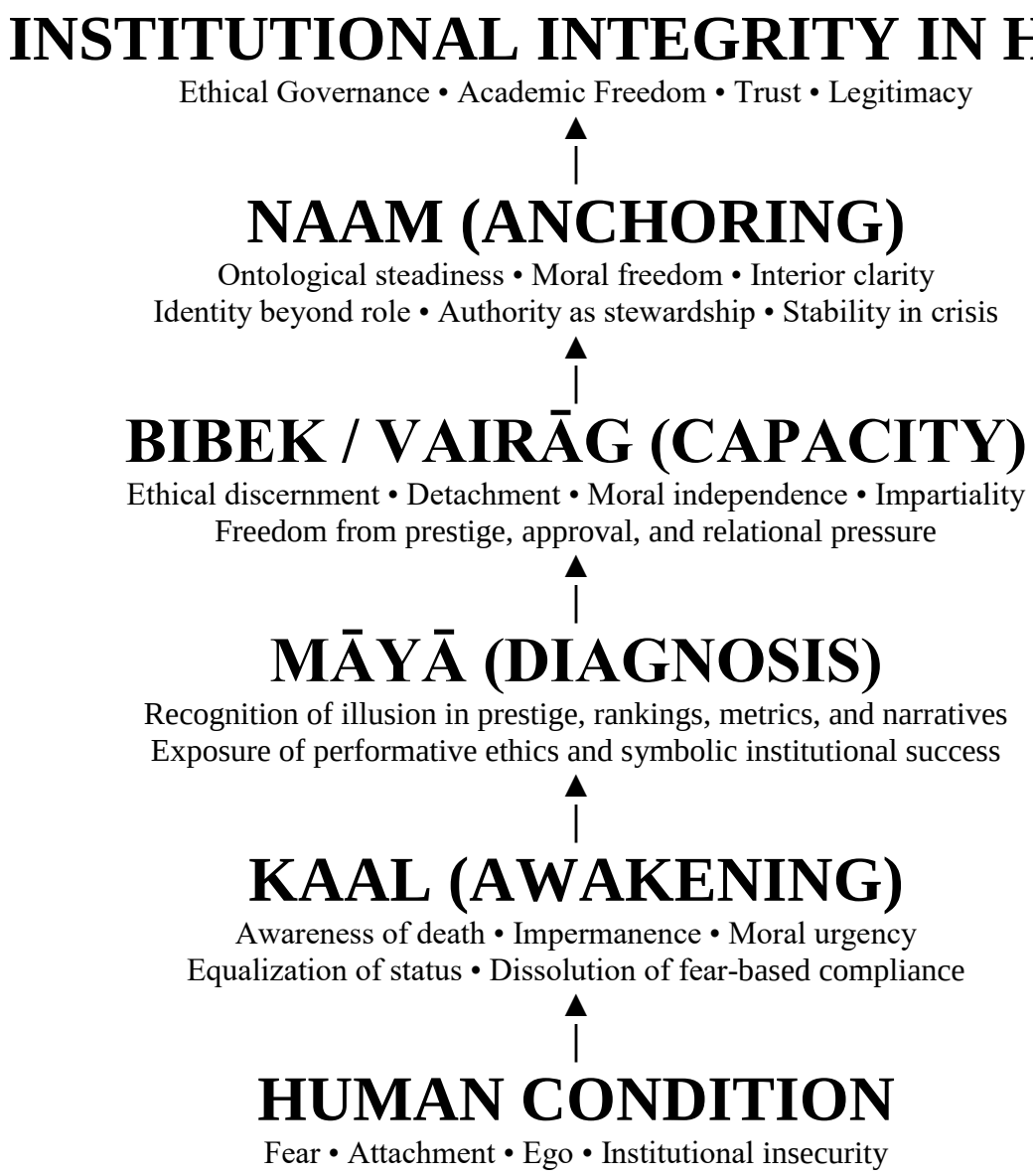
This chapter has argued that ethical leadership in Higher Education Institutions cannot be sustained solely through regulatory frameworks, managerial competence, or institutional compliance mechanisms. While universities often invest significant effort in developing governance structures, policies, and accountability systems, these instruments alone cannot guarantee ethical judgment when leaders encounter fear, attachment, reputational pressure, or institutional competition. Institutional integrity ultimately depends upon the interior formation of those who exercise authority.

Drawing upon the philosophical insights articulated in the teachings of Guru Tegh Bahadur in Salok Mahalla 9, this chapter has translated a spiritual–ethical pedagogy into a structured leadership formation architecture for Higher Education Institutions. The model proposed here understands leadership not primarily as a managerial skill but as the outward expression of inward ethical clarity. Leadership integrity therefore emerges from a progressive process of ethical formation rather than from administrative training alone.

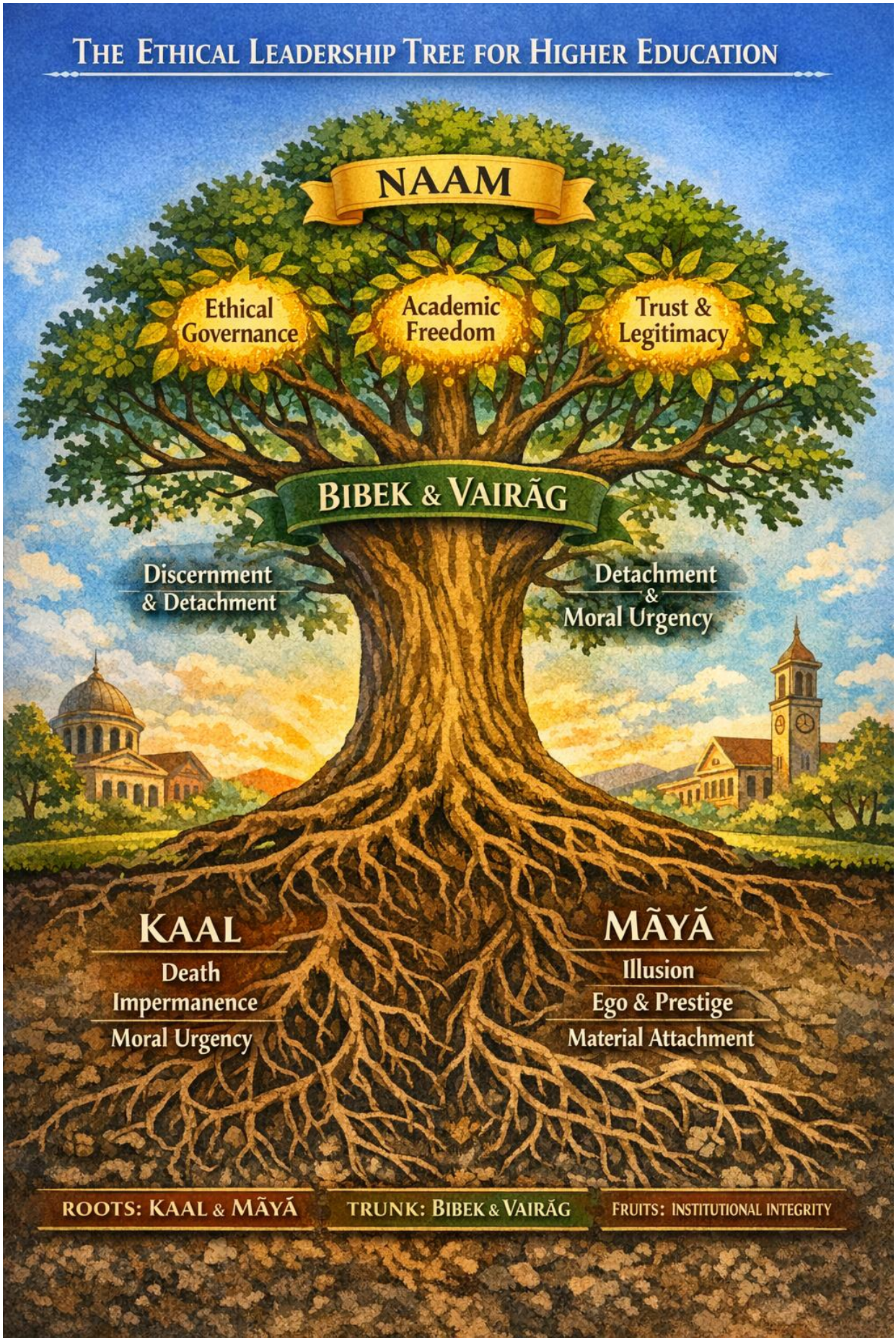


The conceptual progression developed in this chapter unfolds through four interconnected stages. The first stage arises through the recognition of **Kaal**, the reality of death and impermanence. Awareness of mortality dissolves the illusion of permanence attached to status,

authority, and institutional position, thereby weakening the fear that often shapes leadership decisions. Ethical courage becomes possible when leaders recognize that authority is temporary and moral responsibility transcends institutional reward structures.



Universities do not become ethical simply by strengthening regulations; they become ethical when leadership itself is inwardly transformed.


THE ETHICAL LEADERSHIP TREE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION
NAAM
Ethical Governance
Academic Freedom
Trust & Legitimacy
BIBEK & VAIRĀG
Discernment & Detachment
Detachment & Moral Urgency
KAAL
Death
Impermanence
Moral Urgency
MĀYĀ
Illusion
Ego & Prestige
Material Attachment
ROOTS: KAAL & MĀYĀ
TRUNK: BIBEK & VAIRĀG
FRUITS: INSTITUTIONAL INTEGRITY

The key insight figure conveys is: Institutional integrity is the fruit of inwardly formed leadership. Not imposed compliance, but ethical formation flowing outward into governance.
This diagram synthesizes the leadership formation model derived from Salok Mahalla 9.
The **roots** represent the existential diagnosis of the human condition through Kaal (awareness of death and impermanence) and Māyā (recognition of illusion and attachment).
From this foundation emerges the **trunk** of ethical capacity formation through Bibek (discernment) and Vairāg (detachment), which stabilize leadership judgment.
The **crown** symbolizes Naam, the state of ontological anchoring and moral freedom that liberates leadership identity from prestige and institutional performance.
When leadership is thus formed, the institutional fruits—ethical governance, academic freedom, and trust-based legitimacy—naturally emerge within Higher Education Institutions.

The second stage involves the recognition of **Māyā**, the illusions that distort ethical perception. In contemporary universities, Māyā manifests through prestige hierarchies, ranking systems, performance metrics, and narratives of institutional success. These structures frequently encourage symbolic compliance rather than genuine ethical accountability. Recognizing Māyā enables leaders to distinguish appearance from substance and to resist institutional pressures that reward reputation over integrity.

The third stage introduces the stabilizing capacities of **Bibek** (discernment) and **Vairāg** (detachment). Discernment allows leaders to perceive ethical reality clearly within complex institutional situations, while detachment protects judgment from being compromised by ambition, approval, or relational pressure. Together, these capacities enable leaders to act with moral independence even when institutional incentives encourage compromise.

The final stage culminates in **Naam**, understood as a state of interior anchoring and moral freedom. At this level, leadership identity becomes grounded beyond fluctuating institutional circumstances. Authority is exercised as stewardship rather than possession, and ethical action arises from inner steadiness rather than reactive insecurity. Leadership formed in this way becomes capable of sustaining integrity even in environments characterized by uncertainty, competition, and institutional pressure.

The four-stage progression developed in this chapter therefore reflects a movement from existential awareness to ethical capacity and ultimately to institutional consequence:
Human Condition → Kaal → Māyā → Bibek/Vairāg → Naam → Moral Freedom → Institutional Integrity.

This progression suggests that the ethical renewal of universities cannot be achieved through structural reform alone. Governance systems may regulate behaviour, but they cannot produce integrity in the absence of inwardly formed leaders. When leadership formation addresses the deeper dynamics of fear, illusion, attachment, and discernment, ethical clarity begins to stabilize both individual judgment and institutional culture.

Thus, the central philosophical insight emerging from this chapter is that institutional integrity in higher education is not imposed through compliance but cultivated through ethical formation. When leaders become inwardly free from fear and illusion, ethical governance becomes possible, academic freedom becomes defensible, and institutional legitimacy becomes sustainable.

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Conclusion

Toward a Theory of Ethical Leadership Formation Rooted in Gurmat Ontology

This study began with a deceptively simple question: **why do institutions fail ethically even when they possess sophisticated governance structures?** Universities are filled with policies, compliance mechanisms, accountability frameworks, and regulatory oversight. Yet institutional crises continue to arise—not because rules are absent, but because **ethical steadiness within leadership is fragile**.

The argument developed in this book suggests that institutional ethics cannot be sustained by regulation alone. **Ethical institutions are ultimately sustained by ethically formed leaders.** When leadership interiority collapses, structures merely delay institutional decline; they cannot prevent it.

The philosophical framework derived from Gurmat ontology provides a deeper diagnosis of this condition. The human condition, as articulated in this tradition, is shaped by two pervasive distortions: **Kaal**, the existential anxiety produced by impermanence, and **Māyā**, the seduction of power, status, and institutional self-interest. When leadership is unconsciously governed by these forces, decision-making becomes reactive, defensive, and self-preserving.

Institutions then gradually lose their moral coherence.

This book therefore proposed that leadership formation must address not only skills, but **the ontological foundations of ethical agency**. The ethical architecture emerging from the analysis can be summarized as a developmental movement:
Human Condition → Kaal → Māyā → Bibek → Vairāg → Naam → Moral Freedom.

This progression is not merely theological; it represents **a theory of ethical stabilization**. Bibek cultivates moral discernment, enabling leaders to recognize distortions within themselves and within institutions. Vairāg introduces detachment, freeing leadership from compulsive attachment to power, recognition, or institutional survival. Naam then provides ontological anchoring—a deep interior steadiness that allows leaders to act with integrity even under pressure.

At this stage, leadership is no longer merely strategic; it becomes **ethically grounded agency**.

From this perspective, the central claim of this book can be stated simply:

Ethical leadership is not primarily a behavioural competency; it is the outcome of ethical formation.

Higher Education Institutions therefore face a choice. They may continue to treat ethics as a matter of compliance training and regulatory oversight, or they may recognize that **institutional integrity emerges from the inner architecture of leadership itself**.

If universities are to recover their moral authority, leadership formation must move beyond managerial development toward **ethical interiority formation**.

The implications for Higher Education Institutions are profound.

Universities often measure success through performance indicators, productivity metrics, and strategic achievements. Yet ethical leadership cannot be assessed solely through declarations or self-perception. The real test appears when leaders face institutional pressure, reputational risk, or personal cost.

Success is measured by consistency of ethical behaviour under pressure, not by self-report alone.

Likewise, institutional decline rarely begins with dramatic failure. More often, it begins with subtle ethical erosion—small compromises that accumulate until moral clarity disappears.

In this sense, the crisis of leadership in universities is not simply administrative. It is existential.

Universities decay not because leaders die, but because leaders forget death.

The awareness of impermanence—so central to Gurmat reflection on Kaal—restores moral proportion. Leaders who remember the transience of power are less likely to sacrifice ethical integrity for temporary advantage. Awareness of impermanence paradoxically stabilizes ethical courage.

Detachment then becomes a condition for ethical freedom.

Leadership becomes trustworthy when it is no longer attached to position, recognition, or institutional self-preservation.

This insight challenges prevailing models of leadership training. Contemporary programs often emphasize strategic thinking, innovation, and influence. These are important capacities, but without ethical grounding they can easily amplify institutional distortions.

The framework developed in this book therefore proposes a different orientation for leadership formation within Higher Education Institutions:

The task of leadership education is not merely to produce competent administrators, but to cultivate ethically grounded stewards of institutions.

Such stewardship requires inner work. Ethical clarity must precede institutional authority. This leads to a final proposition central to the theory presented here.

Integrity cannot be manufactured by regulation; it emerges from ethically formed leadership.

When leaders are internally anchored, institutions gain moral resilience. Policies become meaningful, accountability becomes credible, and governance becomes trustworthy. Ethical leadership does not eliminate institutional conflict or complexity, but it ensures that decisions remain guided by conscience rather than fear or attachment.

Ultimately, the philosophical contribution of this book lies in proposing that **Gurmat ontology offers a coherent framework for ethical leadership formation**. By diagnosing the distortions that undermine ethical agency and outlining a pathway toward moral freedom, it provides a conceptual foundation upon which leadership training within Higher Education Institutions can be reimagined.

The journey traced in this work—from impermanence to freedom—is therefore not merely spiritual reflection. It is a **practical ethical pedagogy for leadership**.

At its deepest level, the argument can be summarized in one final proposition:
Institutions endure when leaders are anchored beyond the institutions they lead.

Where leadership is grounded in ethical interiority, universities can once again become spaces of intellectual honesty, moral courage, and public trust.

And where such leadership flourishes, institutional integrity ceases to be an aspiration—it becomes a lived reality.

Ethical Leadership Formation: Institutional Propositions

1. Universities do not lose credibility suddenly; they lose it gradually when ethical clarity erodes within leadership.
2. Institutional crises rarely originate in policy failure; they originate in failures of ethical discernment.
3. The deepest governance reform is not structural—it is **ethical formation within leadership**.
4. Ethical leadership is not demonstrated in declarations but **in decisions made under institutional pressure**.
5. Success in leadership must be measured by **consistency of ethical behaviour under pressure**, not by self-report alone.
6. Compliance systems restrain misconduct; **ethical formation prevents it**.
7. Universities decay not because leaders die, **but because leaders forget death**.
8. Awareness of impermanence disciplines ambition and restores ethical proportion.

9. Power becomes trustworthy only when leadership is **detached from its own authority**.
10. Without discernment (Bibek), governance becomes procedural; without detachment (Vairāg), it becomes self-serving.
11. Ethical leadership requires the capacity to act rightly **even when institutional incentives reward the opposite**.
12. Institutions remain legitimate only when leaders are **interiorly anchored beyond institutional success or failure**.
13. When leadership is governed by fear (Kaal) and attachment (Māyā), institutions drift toward ethical compromise.
14. Moral freedom emerges when discernment, detachment, and inner anchoring converge in leadership.
15. Integrity cannot be imposed through regulation; **it emerges from ethically formed leadership**.

Institutions endure not because they are powerful, but because those who lead them are ethically free.

Where leadership is ethically anchored, institutions recover their moral centre.

Final Reflection

The journey traced in this work—from impermanence to freedom—reveals that the crisis of leadership in Higher Education Institutions is not merely administrative but fundamentally ethical and ontological. Institutions cannot be stabilized solely through governance reforms, compliance systems, or procedural safeguards. Their enduring strength lies in the ethical interiority of those entrusted to lead them. When leadership remains captive to the anxieties of **Kaal** and the seductions of **Māyā**, institutions drift toward compromise, however sophisticated their structures may appear. But when discernment (**Bibek**) clarifies judgment, detachment (**Vairāg**) frees leaders from compulsive attachment to power, and inner anchoring (**Naam**) steadies the moral self, leadership becomes capable of acting with integrity even under pressure. In such moments, ethical behaviour ceases to be an institutional requirement and becomes a natural expression of moral freedom. The central insight of this book, therefore, is simple yet demanding: **institutions endure not because of the systems they design, but because of the ethical formation of those who guide them.** Where leadership is inwardly anchored, universities regain their moral coherence and their public trust. The renewal of Higher Education, therefore, begins not with new structures, but with **ethically formed leaders capable of remembering impermanence, resisting illusion, and acting with freedom of conscience.**

The renewal of Higher Education therefore begins not with new structures but with ethically formed leaders capable of remembering impermanence, resisting illusion, and acting with freedom of conscience. In this sense, the philosophical insight that frames this entire study remains profoundly relevant for institutional life:

“ਜਗੁ ਰਚਨਾ ਸਭੁ ਝੂਠੁ ਹੈ ਜਾਨਿ ਲੇਹੁ ਰੇ ਮੀਤ ॥
ਕਹਿ ਨਾਨਕ ਥਿਰੁ ਨ ਰਹੈ ਜਿਉ ਬਾਲੂ ਕੀ ਭੀਤ ॥”

Where leaders remember this truth, institutions recover their ethical centre.

Only leaders anchored beyond impermanence can guide institutions with integrity.

Closing Verses from *Salok Mahalla 9*

Ontological Anchoring

ਰਾਮ ਨਾਮੁ ਉਰ ਮੈ ਗਹਿਓ ਜਾ ਕੈ ਸਮ ਨਹੀ ਕੋਇ ॥

ਜਿਹ ਸਿਮਰਤ ਸੰਕਟ ਮਿਟੈ ਦਰਸੁ ਤੁਹਾਰੋ ਹੋਇ ॥

Translation
I have held the Divine Name within my heart; nothing equals it.
In remembering it, suffering dissolves and clarity emerges.

This verse beautifully captures the **Naam as ontological anchoring**, which you describe as the final stage of ethical formation. Ethical leadership ultimately rests on inner anchoring, for when the centre is steady, decisions remain ethically free.

Impermanence and Ethical Awareness (Kaal)
ਜਗੁ ਰਚਨਾ ਸਭੁ ਝੂਠੁ ਹੈ ਜਾਨਿ ਲੇਹੁ ਰੇ ਮੀਤ ॥

ਕਹਿ ਨਾਨਕ ਥਿਰੁ ਨ ਰਹੈ ਜਿਉ ਬਾਲੂ ਕੀ ਭੀਤ ॥

Translation
The structures of the world are transient; know this well, O friend.
They do not endure, like a wall built of sand.

This verse directly reflects your discussion of **Kaal and impermanence**, reminding leaders that institutions themselves are fragile. Awareness of impermanence produces ethical restraint and humility.

Freedom from Fear and Attachment (Bibek / Vairāg)
ਭੈ ਕਾਹੂ ਕਉ ਦੇਤ ਨਹਿ ਨਹਿ ਭੈ ਮਾਨਤ ਆਨ ॥

ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਸੁਨਿ ਰੇ ਮਨਾ ਗਿਆਨੀ ਤਾਹਿ ਬਖਾਨਿ ॥

Translation
One who neither frightens others nor fears anyone—
says Nanak, such a person is the truly wise one.

This verse perfectly expresses **ethical independence**, the outcome of **Bibek and Vairāg**. True ethical leadership neither intimidates nor submits to intimidation.

Equanimity Under Pressure (Moral Freedom)
ਸੁਖੁ ਦੁਖੁ ਦੋਨੋ ਸਮ ਕਰਿ ਜਾਣੈ ਅਉਰੁ ਮਾਨੁ ਅਪਮਾਨਾ ॥

ਹਰਖ ਸੋਗ ਤੇ ਰਹੈ ਅਤੀਤਾ ਤਿਨਿ ਜਗਿ ਤਤੁ ਪਛਾਨਾ ॥

Translation
One who regards pleasure and pain alike, honor and dishonor alike—
who rises above joy and sorrow—such a person understands reality.

This expresses the **state of moral freedom** that your leadership formation model ultimately seeks.

This study has attempted to read *Salok Mahalla 9* not only as spiritual wisdom but as a profound ethical pedagogy for leadership. The verses attributed to Guru Tegh Bahadur illuminate the human condition with remarkable clarity, exposing the anxieties of impermanence and the seductions of attachment that often distort judgment and weaken institutional integrity. Yet they also offer a path toward freedom—through discernment, detachment, and inner anchoring. If Higher Education Institutions are to retain their moral credibility, leadership must be formed within this deeper ethical horizon. Structures and policies may guide institutions, but only ethically grounded leaders can sustain their integrity. The hope of this work is therefore simple: that leadership within our institutions may increasingly be shaped not merely by authority or ambition, but by clarity of conscience and freedom of spirit.

Final Verse
ਭੈ ਕਾਹੂ ਕਉ ਦੇਤ ਨਹਿ ਨਹਿ ਭੈ ਮਾਨਤ ਆਨ ॥

ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਸੁਨਿ ਰੇ ਮਨਾ ਗਿਆਨੀ ਤਾਹਿ ਬਖਾਨਿ ॥

One who neither frightens others nor fears anyone—
says Nanak, that person alone deserves to be called wise.

Final Epigraph
Institutions endure when those who lead them are ethically free.

Benediction

May leadership be guided by discernment,
freed from attachment,
and anchored in truth.

May those who lead remember impermanence,
see through illusion,
and act with freedom of conscience.

May our institutions be sustained
by leaders whose integrity
outlives their authority.

May discernment illuminate judgment,
detachment steady the will,
and truth anchor the self.

Where conscience is steady,
leadership becomes service
and institutions find their centre.

Annexure A
Salok Mahalla 9

(Gurmukhi | Transliteration | Brief English Interpretation)

੧

ਗੁਨ ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਗਾਇਓ ਨਹੀ ਜਨਮੁ ਅਕਾਰਥ ਕੀਨੁ ॥

ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਹਰਿ ਭਜੁ ਮਨਾ ਜਿਹ ਬਿਧਿ ਜਲ ਕਉ ਮੀਨੁ ॥੧॥

gun gobind gaaio nahee janam akaarath keen.
kaho naanak har bhaj manaa jih bidh jal kau meen.
Brief Interpretation:
If one does not sing the praises of the Lord, life becomes fruitless. Nanak says: O mind, remember the Lord as a fish depends wholly on water.

੨

ਬਿਖਿਅਨ ਸਿਉ ਕਾਹੇ ਰਚਿਓ ਨਿਮਖ ਨ ਹੋਹਿ ਉਦਾਸੁ ॥

ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਭਜੁ ਹਰਿ ਮਨਾ ਪਰੈ ਨ ਜਮ ਕੀ ਫਾਸ ॥੨॥

bikhian sio kaahe rachiou nimakh na hohi udaas.
kaho naanak bhaj har manaa parai na jam kee faas.
Brief Interpretation:
Why be engrossed in sin? You are not detached even for a moment. Nanak says: O mind, vibrate upon the Lord — then you will not be caught in the noose of death.

੩

ਤਰਨਾਪੋ ਇਉ ਹੀ ਗਇਓ ਲੀਓ ਜਰਾ ਤਨੁ ਜੀਤਿ ॥

ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਭਜੁ ਹਰਿ ਮਨਾ ਅਉਧ ਜਾਤੁ ਹੈ ਬੀਤਿ ॥੩॥

tarnaapo iou hee gaio lee-o jaraa tan jeet.
kaho naanak bhaj har manaa aoudh jaat hai beet.
Brief Interpretation:
Your youth has slipped away, old age has overtaken the body. Nanak says: O mind, meditate on the Lord — life is fleeting.

੪

ਬਿਰਧਿ ਭਇਓ ਸੂਝੈ ਨਹੀ ਕਾਲੁ ਪਹੂਚਿਓ ਆਨਿ ॥

ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਨਰ ਬਾਵਰੇ ਕਿਉ ਨ ਭਜੈ ਭਗਵਾਨੁ ॥੪॥

biradh bhaio soojhai nahee kaal pahuchio aan.
kaho naanak nar baavare kio na bhajai bhagvaan.
Brief Interpretation:
Old age has arrived, yet you do not discern that death is near. Nanak says: O fool, why do you not remember the Lord?

੫

ਧਨੁ ਦਾਰਾ ਸੰਪਤਿ ਸਗਲ ਜਿਨਿ ਅਪੁਨੀ ਕਰਿ ਮਾਨਿ ॥

ਇਨ ਮੈ ਕਛੁ ਸੰਗੀ ਨਹੀ ਨਾਨਕ ਸਾਚੀ ਜਾਨਿ ॥੫॥

dhan daaraa sampat sagal jin apunee kar maan.
in mai kachh sangee nahee naanak saachee jaan.
Brief Interpretation:
Wealth, spouse, and possessions that one calls “mine” — none will accompany you. Nanak says: Know this as truth.

੬

ਪਤਿਤ ਉਧਾਰਨ ਭੈ ਹਰਨ ਹਰਿ ਅਨਾਥ ਕੇ ਨਾਥ ॥

ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਤਿਹ ਜਾਨੀਐ ਸਦਾ ਬਸਤੁ ਤੁਮ ਸਾਥਿ ॥੬॥

patit udhaaran bhai haran har anaath ke naath.
kaho naanak tih jaaniai sadaa basat tum saath.
Brief Interpretation:
The Lord uplifts the fallen and removes fear; He is protector of the helpless. Nanak says: Know that He ever abides with you.

੭

ਤਨੁ ਧਨੁ ਜਿਹ ਤੋ ਕਉ ਦੀਓ ਤਾਂ ਸਿਉ ਨੇਹੁ ਨ ਕੀਨ ॥

ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਨਰ ਬਾਵਰੇ ਅਬ ਕਿਉ ਡੋਲਤ ਦੀਨ ॥੭॥

tan dhan jih to kau deo taan sio nehu na keen.
kaho naanak nar baavare ab kio dholat deen.
Brief Interpretation:
The body and wealth were given to you, yet you do not cherish the Naam. Nanak says: O mind, why do you tremble over worldly possessions?

੮

ਤਨੁ ਧਨੁ ਸੰਪੈ ਸੁਖ ਦਿਓ ਅਰੁ ਜਿਹ ਨੀਕੇ ਧਾਮ ॥

ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਸੁਨੁ ਰੇ ਮਨਾ ਸਿਮਰਤ ਕਾਹਿ ਨ ਰਾਮੁ ॥੮॥

tan dhan sanpai sukh deo ar jih neeke dhaam.
kaho naanak sun re manaa simarat kaahi na raam.
Brief Interpretation:
You have been given body, wealth, and comfort — yet you do not remember the Lord. Nanak says: O mind, recall Him constantly.

੯

ਸਭੁ ਸੁਖੁ ਦਾਤਾ ਰਾਮੁ ਹੈ ਦੂਸਰ ਨਾਹਿਨ ਕੋਇ ॥

ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਸੁਨਿ ਰੇ ਮਨਾ ਤਿਹ ਸਿਮਰਤ ਗਤਿ ਹੋਇ ॥੯॥

sabh sukh dhaataa raam hai doosar naahin koe.
kaho naanak sun re manaa tih simarat gat hoe.
Brief Interpretation:
The Lord alone is the giver of peace; there is none other. Nanak says: O mind, meditate upon Him; liberation is attained.

੧੦

ਜਿਹ ਸਿਮਰਤ ਗਤਿ ਪਾਈਐ ਤਿਹ ਭਜੁ ਰੇ ਤੈ ਮੀਤ ॥

ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਸੁਨੁ ਰੇ ਮਨਾ ਅਉਧ ਘਟਤ ਹੈ ਨੀਤ ॥੧੦॥

jih simarat gat paaeeai tih bhaj re tai meet.
kaho naanak sun re manaa aoudh ghatat hai neeth.
Brief Interpretation:
Those who meditate and realize liberation, O friend, sing His praise; life is fleeting.

੧੧

ਪਾਂਚ ਤਤ ਕੋ ਤਨੁ ਰਚਿਓ ਜਾਨਹੁ ਚਤੁਰ ਸੁਜਾਨ ॥

ਜਿਹ ਤੇ ਉਪਜਿਓ ਨਾਨਕਾ ਲੀਨ ਤਾਹਿ ਮੈ ਮਾਨੁ ॥੧੧॥

paanch thath ko tan rachio jaanahu chatur sujaan.
jih te upajio naanakka leen taahi mai maan.
Brief Interpretation:
Know that your body is made of the five elements. From that same source you shall merge again.

੧੨

ਘਟ ਘਟ ਮੈ ਹਰਿ ਜੂ ਬਸੈ ਸੰਤਨ ਕਹਿਓ ਪੁਕਾਰਿ ॥

ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਤਿਹ ਭਜੁ ਮਨਾ ਭਉ ਨਿਧਿ ਉਤਰਹਿ ਪਾਰਿ ॥੧੨॥

ghat ghat mai har joo basai santhan kaheo pukaar.
kaho naanak tih bhaj manaa bhau nidh utarahi paar.
Brief Interpretation:
The Lord abides in every heart, say the Saints. O mind, sing His praise and cross over fear and dread.

੧੩

ਸੁਖੁ ਦੁਖੁ ਜਿਹ ਪਰਸੈ ਨਹੀ ਲੋਭੁ ਮੋਹੁ ਅਭਿਮਾਨੁ ॥

ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਸੁਨੁ ਰੇ ਮਨਾ ਸੋ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਭਗਵਾਨ ॥੧੩॥

sukh dukh jih parsai nehi lobh moh abhiman.
kaho naanak sun re manaa so moorath bhagvaan.
Brief Interpretation:
One who is untouched by pleasure, pain, attachment, or ego — Nanak says: O mind, that person knows the Lord himself.

੧੪

ਉਸਤਤਿ ਨਿੰਦਿਆ ਨਾਹਿ ਜਿਹਿ ਕੰਚਨ ਲੋਹ ਸਮਾਨਿ ॥

ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਸੁਨਿ ਰੇ ਮਨਾ ਮੁਕਤਿ ਤਾਹਿ ਤੈ ਜਾਨਿ ॥੧੪॥

ustat nindiaa naahi jih kanchan loh samaan.
kaho naanak sun re manaa mukt taahi tai jaan.
Brief Interpretation:
There is no praise or blame for one who sees gold and iron alike. Nanak says: O mind, know that person to be liberated.

੧੫

ਹਰਖੁ ਸੋਗੁ ਜਾ ਕੈ ਨਹਿ ਬੈਰੀ ਮੀਤ ਸਮਾਨਿ ॥

ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਸੁਨਿ ਰੇ ਮਨਾ ਮੁਕਤਿ ਤਾਹਿ ਤੈ ਜਾਨਿ ॥੧੫॥

harakh sog ja kai nehi bairee meet samaan.
kaho naanak sun re manaa mukt taahi tai jaan.
Brief Interpretation:
Joy and sorrow are alike; no friend or foe is permanent. Nanak says: O mind, know that person to be liberated.

੧੬

ਭੈ ਕਾਹੂ ਕਉ ਦੇਤ ਨਹਿ ਨਹਿ ਭੈ ਮਾਨਤ ਆਨ ॥

ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਸੁਨਿ ਰੇ ਮਨਾ ਗਿਆਨੀ ਤਾਹਿ ਬਖਾਨਿ ॥੧੬॥

bhai kaahoo kau det neh neh bhai maanat aan.
kahu naanak sun re manaa giaanee taahi bakhaan.
Brief Interpretation:
One who does not instill fear in others, and who does not fear anyone, is called truly wise. Nanak says: O mind, such a person is spiritually accomplished.

੧੭

ਜਿਹਿ ਬਿਖਿਆ ਸਗਲੀ ਤਜੀ ਲੀਓ ਭੇਖ ਬੈਰਾਗ ॥

ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਸੁਨੁ ਰੇ ਮਨਾ ਤਿਹਿ ਨਰ ਮਾਥੈ ਭਾਗੁ ॥੧੭॥

jihi bikhiaa sagalee tajee leeo bhekh bairāg.
kahu naanak sun re manaa tih nar māthai bhaag.
Brief Interpretation:
One who abandons all sin and corruption and dons the robe of detachment, Nanak says: O mind, good fortune is written upon that person's brow.

੧੮

ਜਿਹਿ ਮਾਇਆ ਮਮਤਾ ਤਜੀ ਸਭ ਤੇ ਭਇਓ ਉਦਾਸੁ ॥

ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਸੁਨੁ ਰੇ ਮਨਾ ਤਿਹਿ ਘਟਿ ਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਨਿਵਾਸੁ ॥੧੮॥

jihi māiaa mamathā tajee sabh te bhaeio udaas.
kahu naanak sun re manaa tih ghat braham nivaas.
Brief Interpretation:
One who renounces Maya and possessiveness and becomes detached from all, Nanak says: O mind, in that person's heart the Divine forever abides.

੧੯

ਜਿਹਿ ਪ੍ਰਾਨੀ ਹਉਮੈ ਤਜੀ ਕਰਤਾ ਰਾਮੁ ਪਛਾਨਿ ॥

ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਵਹੁ ਮੁਕਤਿ ਨਰੁ ਇਹ ਮਨ ਸਾਚੀ ਮਾਨੁ ॥੧੯॥

jihi praanee haumai tajee kartā Rām pachhān.
kahu naanak vahu mukath nar ih man sāchee mān.
Brief Interpretation:
That being who forsakes ego and recognizes the Creator Lord — Nanak says: that person is liberated; O mind, know this as truth.

੨੦

ਭੈ ਨਾਸਨ ਦੁਰਮਤਿ ਹਰਨ ਕਲਿ ਮੈ ਹਰਿ ਕੋ ਨਾਮੁ ॥

ਨਿਸਿ ਦਿਨੁ ਜੋ ਨਾਨਕ ਭਜੈ ਸਫਲ ਹੋਹਿ ਤਿਹਿ ਕਾਮ ॥੨੦॥

bhai nāasan durmath haran kal mai har ko nām.
nis dhin jo naanak bhajai safal hohi tih kaam.
Brief Interpretation:
In this Dark Age (Kali Yuga), the Lord's Name destroys fear and eradicates evil thoughts. Night and day, whoever meditates on the Lord's Name — O Nanak — all their purposes are fulfilled.

੨੧

ਜਿਹਬਾ ਗੁਨ ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਭਜਹੁ ਕਰਨ ਸੁਨਹੁ ਹਰਿ ਨਾਮੁ ॥

ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਸੁਨਿ ਰੇ ਮਨਾ ਪਰਹਿ ਨ ਜਮ ਕੈ ਧਾਮ ॥੨੧॥

jihbaa gun gobind bhajahu karan sunahu har naam.
kahu naanak suni re manaa parahi na jam kai dhaam.
Brief Interpretation:
Vibrate the praises of the Lord of the Universe with your tongue and listen to the Naam with your ears. Nanak says: O mind, then you will not have to go to the abode of Death.

੨੨

ਬਲੁ ਛੁਟਕਿਓ ਬੰਧਨ ਪਰੇ ਕਛੂ ਨ ਹੋਤ ਉਪਾਇ ॥

ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਅਬ ਓਟ ਹਰਿ ਗਜ ਜਿਉ ਹੋਹੁ ਸਹਾਇ ॥੨੨॥

bal chhutkio bandhan pare kachhu na hot upaai.
kahu naanak ab ot har gaj jiou hohu sahaai.
Brief Interpretation:
The bond of existence is broken; there is now no other way to liberation. Nanak says: O mind, seek the Lord's shelter; He alone is protector in the hour of peril.

੨੩

ਬਲੁ ਹੋਆ ਬੰਧਨ ਛੁਟੇ ਸਭੁ ਕਿਛੁ ਹੋਤ ਉਪਾਇ ॥

ਨਾਨਕ ਸਭੁ ਕਿਛੁ ਤੁਮਰੈ ਹਾਥ ਮੈ ਤੁਮ ਹੀ ਹੋਤ ਸਹਾਇ ॥੨੩॥

bal hoa bandhan chhute sabh kichh hot upaai.
naanak sabh kichh tumrai haath mai tum hee hot sahaai.
Brief Interpretation:
Once the bonds are broken, there is no other recourse. Nanak says: everything lies in Your hands; O Lord, You alone are the helper.

੨੪

ਸੰਗ ਸਖਾ ਸਭਿ ਤਜਿ ਗਏ ਕੋਈ ਨ ਨਿਭਿਓ ਸਾਥਿ ॥

ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਇਹ ਬਿਪਤਿ ਮੈ ਟੇਕ ਏਕ ਰਘੁਨਾਥ ॥੨੪॥

sang sakhaa sabh taj gaye koi na nibhio saath.
kahu naanak ih bipt mai tek ek Raghunaath.
Brief Interpretation:
All companions and friends abandon you; no one remains faithful in adversity. Nanak says: in this crisis, the only support is the Lord of the Raghu family.

੨੫

ਨਾਮੁ ਰਹਿਓ ਸਾਧੂ ਰਹਿਓ ਰਹਿਓ ਗੁਰੁ ਗੋਬਿੰਦੁ ॥

ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਇਹ ਜਗਤ ਮੈ ਕਿਨਿ ਜਪਿਓ ਗੁਰ ਮੰਤੁ ॥੨੫॥

naam rahio saadhhoo rahio rahio gur gobind.
kahu naanak ih jagat mai kin japio gur mant.
Brief Interpretation:
Remain in Naam and in the company of the holy; remain with the Guru and the Lord of the Universe. Nanak says: who in this world has meditated upon the Guru's mantra?

੨੬

ਪ੍ਰਾਨੀ ਕਛੂ ਨ ਚੇਤਈ ਮਦਿ ਮਾਇਆ ਕੈ ਅੰਧੁ ॥

ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਬਿਨੁ ਹਰਿ ਭਜਨ ਪਰਤ ਤਾਹਿ ਜਮ ਫੰਧ ॥੨੬॥

Prānī kachhū na chetai mad māiā kai andh.
Kahu Nānak bin Har bhajan parat tāhi jam phand.
The human being, blinded by the intoxication of māyā, remains unaware of reality. Nanak says: without remembrance of the Divine, one falls into the noose of existential bondage.

੨੭

ਜਉ ਸੁਖ ਕਉ ਚਾਹੈ ਸਦਾ ਸਰਨਿ ਰਾਮ ਕੀ ਲੇਹ ॥

ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਸੁਨਿ ਰੇ ਮਨਾ ਦੁਰਲਭ ਮਾਨੁਖ ਦੇਹ ॥੨੭॥

Jau sukh kau chāhai sadā saran Rām kī leh.
Kahu Nānak sun re manā durlabh mānukh deh.
If one desires lasting peace, take refuge in the Divine. O mind, listen—this human birth is rare and precious.

੨੮

ਮਾਇਆ ਕਾਰਨਿ ਧਾਵਹੀ ਮੂਰਖ ਲੋਗ ਅਜਾਨ ॥

ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਬਿਨੁ ਹਰਿ ਭਜਨ ਬਿਰਥਾ ਜਨਮੁ ਸਿਰਾਨ ॥੨੮॥

Māiā kāran dhāvehī mūrakh log ajān.
Kahu Nānak bin Har bhajan birthā janam sirān.
||28||
Foolish and ignorant people run after māyā. Nanak says: without Divine remembrance, life passes in vain.

੨੯

ਜੋ ਪ੍ਰਾਨੀ ਨਿਸਿ ਦਿਨੁ ਭਜੈ ਰੂਪ ਰਾਮ ਤਿਹ ਜਾਨੁ ॥

ਹਰਿ ਜਨ ਹਰਿ ਅੰਤਰੁ ਨਹੀ ਨਾਨਕ ਸਾਚੀ ਮਾਨੁ ॥੨੯॥

Jo prānī nis din bhajai rūp Rām tih jān.
Har jan Har antar nahī Nānak sāchī mān.

One who remembers the Divine day and night becomes absorbed in that Reality. Between the Divine and such a servant there is no separation—this is the truth.

੩੦

ਮਨੁ ਮਾਇਆ ਮੈ ਫਧਿ ਰਹਿਓ ਬਿਸਰਿਓ ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਨਾਮੁ ॥

ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਬਿਨੁ ਹਰਿ ਭਜਨ ਜੀਵਨ ਕਉਨੇ ਕਾਮ ॥੩੦॥

Man māiā mai fadh rahiō bisariō Gobind nām.
Kahu Nānak bin Har bhajan jīvan kaune kām.
The mind remains trapped in māyā and forgets the Divine Name. Without remembrance, what value does life truly hold?

੩੧

ਪ੍ਰਾਨੀ ਰਾਮੁ ਨ ਚੇਤਈ ਮਦਿ ਮਾਇਆ ਕੈ ਅੰਧੁ ॥

ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਹਰਿ ਭਜਨ ਬਿਨੁ ਪਰਤ ਤਾਹਿ ਜਮ ਫੰਧ ॥੩੧॥

Prānī Rām na chetai mad māiā kai andh.
Kahu Nānak Har bhajan bin parat tāhi jam phand.
The person, blinded by intoxication of māyā, does not remember the Divine. Without remembrance, one again falls into bondage.

੩੨

ਸੁਖ ਮੈ ਬਹੁ ਸੰਗੀ ਭਏ ਦੁਖ ਮੈ ਸੰਗਿ ਨ ਕੋਇ ॥

ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਹਰਿ ਭਜੁ ਮਨਾ ਅੰਤਿ ਸਹਾਈ ਹੋਇ ॥੩੨॥

Sukh mai bahu sangī bhae dukh mai sang na koe.
Kahu Nānak Har bhaj manā ant sahāī hoe.
In times of comfort many companions gather; in suffering none remain. O mind, remember the Divine—only that support endures at the end.

੩੩

ਜਨਮ ਜਨਮ ਭਰਮਤ ਫਿਰਿਓ ਮਿਟਿਓ ਨ ਜਮ ਕੋ ਤ੍ਰਾਸੁ ॥

ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਹਰਿ ਭਜੁ ਮਨਾ ਨਿਰਭੈ ਪਾਵਹਿ ਬਾਸੁ ॥੩੩॥

Janam janam bharamat phiriō miṭiō na jam ko trās.
Kahu Nānak Har bhaj manā nirbhai pāvahi bās.
Across lifetimes one wanders, yet fear of death does not vanish. O mind, remember the Divine and dwell in fearlessness.

੩੪

ਜਤਨ ਬਹੁਤੁ ਮੈ ਕਰਿ ਰਹਿਓ ਮਿਟਿਓ ਨ ਮਨ ਕੋ ਮਾਨੁ ॥

ਦੁਰਮਤਿ ਸਿਉ ਨਾਨਕ ਫਧਿਓ ਰਾਖਿ ਲੇਹੁ ਭਗਵਾਨ ॥੩੪॥

Jatan bahut mai kar rahiō miṭiō na man ko mān.
Durmat siu Nānak fadhio rākhi lehu Bhagvān.
Though many efforts are made, ego does not depart. Entangled in wrong understanding, Nanak prays: O Divine, preserve me.

੩੫

ਬਾਲ ਜੁਆਨੀ ਅਰੁ ਬਿਰਧਿ ਫੁਨਿ ਤੀਨਿ ਅਵਸਥਾ ਜਾਨਿ ॥

ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਹਰਿ ਭਜਨ ਬਿਨੁ ਬਿਰਥਾ ਸਭ ਹੀ ਮਾਨੁ ॥੩੫॥

Bāl juānī aru birdh phun tīni avasthā jān.
Kahu Nānak Har bhajan bin birthā sabh hī mān
Childhood, youth, and old age—know these three stages well. Without Divine remembrance, all stages pass in vain.

੩੬

ਕਰਣੋ ਹੁਤੋ ਸੁ ਨਾ ਕੀਓ ਪਰਿਓ ਲੋਭ ਕੈ ਫੰਧ ॥

ਨਾਨਕ ਸਮਿਓ ਰਮਿ ਗਇਓ ਅਬ ਕਿਉ ਰੋਵਤ ਅੰਧ ॥੩੬॥

Karaṇo huto su nā kīo pariō lobh kai phand.
Nānak samiō ram gaio ab kiu rovat andh.
What ought to have been done was not done; one fell into the snare of greed. Time has slipped away—why lament now in blindness?

੩੭

ਮਨੁ ਮਾਇਆ ਮੈ ਰਮਿ ਰਹਿਓ ਨਿਕਸਤ ਨਾਹਿਨ ਮੀਤ ॥

ਨਾਨਕ ਮੂਰਤਿ ਚਿਤ੍ਰ ਜਿਉ ਛਾਡਿਤ ਨਾਹਿਨ ਭੀਤਿ ॥੩੭॥

Man māiā mai ram rahiō nikasat nāhin mīt.
Nānak mūrat chitr jiu chhādit nāhin bhīt.
The mind remains absorbed in māyā and cannot escape, O friend. Like a painted image on a wall, it does not detach from its surface.

੩੮

ਨਰ ਚਾਹਤ ਕਛੁ ਅਉਰ ਅਉਰੈ ਕੀ ਅਉਰੈ ਭਈ ॥

ਚਿਤਵਤ ਰਹਿਓ ਠਗਉਰ ਨਾਨਕ ਫਾਸੀ ਗਲਿ ਪਰੀ ॥੩੮॥

Nar chāhat kachh aur aurai kī aurai bhaī.
Chitvat rahiō ṭhagaur Nānak fāsī gal parī
A person desires one thing, but something else entirely occurs. Remaining absorbed in deception, one finds the noose around the neck.

੩੯

ਜਤਨ ਬਹੁਤ ਸੁਖ ਕੇ ਕੀਏ ਦੁਖ ਕੋ ਕੀਓ ਨ ਕੋਇ ॥

ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਸੁਨਿ ਰੇ ਮਨਾ ਹਰਿ ਭਾਵੈ ਸੋ ਹੋਇ ॥੩੯॥

Jatan bahut sukh ke kīe dukh ko kīo na koe.
Kahu Nānak sun re manā Har bhāvai so hoe.
Many efforts are made to secure comfort; none are made to embrace suffering. O mind, listen—only what pleases the Divine comes to pass.

੪੦

ਜਗਤੁ ਭਿਖਾਰੀ ਫਿਰਤੁ ਹੈ ਸਭ ਕੋ ਦਾਤਾ ਰਾਮੁ ॥

ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਮਨ ਸਿਮਰੁ ਤਿਹ ਪੂਰਨ ਹੋਵਹਿ ਕਾਮ ॥੪੦॥

Jagat bhikhārī firat hai sabh ko dātā Rām.

Kahu Nānak man simar tih pūran hovahi kām
The world wanders as a beggar; the Divine alone is the Giver. O mind, remember That—your purposes shall find fulfillment.

੪੧

ਝੂਠੈ ਮਾਨੁ ਕਹਾ ਕਰੈ ਜਗੁ ਸੁਪਨੇ ਜਿਉ ਜਾਨੁ ॥
ਇਨ ਮੈ ਕਛੁ ਤੇਰੋ ਨਹੀ ਨਾਨਕ ਕਹਿਓ ਬਖਾਨਿ ॥੪੧॥

Jhūṭhai mān kahā karai jag supne jiu jān.
In mai kachh tero nahī Nānak kahiō bakhān.
Why take pride in falsehood? Know the world as a dream. Nothing here truly belongs to you.

੪੨

ਗਰਬੁ ਕਰਤੁ ਹੈ ਦੇਹ ਕੋ ਬਿਨਸੈ ਛਿਨ ਮੈ ਮੀਤ ॥
ਜਿਹਿ ਪ੍ਰਾਨੀ ਹਰਿ ਜਸੁ ਕਹਿਓ ਨਾਨਕ ਤਿਹਿ ਜਗੁ ਜੀਤਿ ॥੪੨॥

Garab karat hai deh ko binsai chhin mai mīt.
Jih prānī Har jas kahiō Nānak tih jag jīt.
One takes pride in the body, yet it perishes in a moment. The one who sings the Divine praise—that person conquers the world.

੪੩

ਜਿਹ ਘਟਿ ਸਿਮਰਨੁ ਰਾਮ ਕੋ ਸੋ ਨਰੁ ਮੁਕਤਾ ਜਾਨੁ ॥
ਤਿਹਿ ਨਰ ਹਰਿ ਅੰਤਰੁ ਨਹੀ ਨਾਨਕ ਸਾਚੀ ਮਾਨੁ ॥੪੩॥

Jih ghaṭ simran Rām ko so nar muktā jān.
Tih nar Har antar nahī Nānak sāchī mān
In whose heart resides remembrance of the Divine—know that person as liberated. Between that being and the Divine there is no separation.

੪੪

ਏਕ ਭਗਤਿ ਭਗਵਾਨ ਜਿਹ ਪ੍ਰਾਨੀ ਕੈ ਨਾਹਿ ਮਨਿ ॥
ਜੈਸੇ ਸੂਕਰ ਸੁਆਨ ਨਾਨਕ ਮਾਨੇ ਤਾਹਿ ਤਨੁ ॥੪੪॥

Ek bhagat Bhagvān jih prānī kai nāhi man.
Jaise sūkar suān Nānak māno tāhi tan.
If a person holds no devotion to the Divine in the heart, consider that body like that of a pig or a dog.

੪੫

ਸੁਆਮੀ ਕੋ ਗ੍ਰਿਹੁ ਜਿਉ ਸਦਾ ਸੁਆਨ ਤਜਤ ਨਹੀ ਨਿਤ ॥
ਨਾਨਕ ਇਹ ਬਿਧਿ ਹਰਿ ਭਜਉ ਇਕ ਮਨਿ ਹੁਇ ਇਕ ਚਿਤਿ ॥੪੫॥

Suāmī ko grih jiu sadā suān tajat nahī nit.
Nānak ih bidh Har bhajau ik man hui ik chit.
As a dog never abandons its master's home, so should one remember the Divine—with one-pointed mind and single awareness.

੪੬

ਤੀਰਥ ਬਰਤ ਅਰੁ ਦਾਨ ਕਰਿ ਮਨ ਮੈ ਧਰੈ ਗੁਮਾਨੁ ॥
ਨਾਨਕ ਨਿਹਫਲ ਜਾਤ ਤਿਹ ਜਿਉ ਕੁੰਚਰ ਇਸਨਾਨੁ ॥੪੬॥

Tīrath barat aru dān kar man mai dharai gumān.
Nānak nihphal jāt tih jiu kunchar isnān.
One performs pilgrimages, fasts, and charity yet harbours pride within. Such actions are fruitless—like an elephant's bath.

੪੭

ਸਿਰੁ ਕੰਪਿਓ ਪਗ ਡਗਮਗੇ ਨੈਨ ਜੋਤਿ ਤੇ ਹੀਨ ॥
ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਇਹ ਬਿਧਿ ਭਈ ਤਊ ਨ ਹਰਿ ਰਸਿ ਲੀਨ ॥੪੭॥

Sir kampiō pag dagmage nain jot te hīn.
Kahu Nānak ih bidh bhaī taū na Har ras līn.
The head trembles, the feet stagger, the eyes lose light. Even then, one does not immerse in Divine essence.

੪੮

ਨਿਜ ਕਰਿ ਦੇਖਿਓ ਜਗਤੁ ਮੈ ਕੋ ਕਾਹੂ ਕੋ ਨਾਹਿ ॥
ਨਾਨਕ ਥਿਰੁ ਹਰਿ ਭਗਤਿ ਹੈ ਤਿਹ ਰਾਖੋ ਮਨ ਮਾਹਿ ॥੪੮॥

Nij kar dekhiō jagat mai ko kāhū ko nāh.
Nānak thir Har bhagat hai tih rākho man māh.

੪੯

ਰਾਮੁ ਗਇਓ ਰਾਵਨੁ ਗਇਓ ਜਾ ਕਉ ਬਹੁ ਪਰਵਾਰੁ ॥
ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਥਿਰੁ ਕਛੁ ਨਹੀ ਸੁਪਨੇ ਜਿਉ ਸੰਸਾਰੁ ॥੪੯॥

Rām gaiō Rāvan gaiō jā kau bahu parvār.
Kahu Nānak thir kachh nahī supne jiu sansār.
Rāma is gone, Rāvaṇa is gone—even those with vast families. Nothing is permanent; the world is like a dream.

੫੧

ਚਿੰਤਾ ਤਾ ਕੀ ਕੀਜੀਐ ਜੋ ਅਨਹੋਨੀ ਹੋਇ ॥
ਇਹੁ ਮਾਰਗੁ ਸੰਸਾਰ ਕੋ ਨਾਨਕ ਥਿਰੁ ਨਹੀ ਕੋਇ ॥੫੧॥

Chintā tā kī kījīai jo anhonī hoe.
Ihu mārag sansār ko Nānak thir nahī koe.
Worry only about what is impossible—but such a thing never occurs. This is the way of the world: nothing here is permanent.

੫੨

ਜੋ ਉਪਜਿਓ ਸੋ ਬਿਨਸਿ ਹੈ ਪਰੋ ਆਜੁ ਕੈ ਕਾਲਿ ॥
ਨਾਨਕ ਹਰਿ ਗੁਨ ਗਾਇ ਲੇ ਛਾਡਿ ਸਗਲ ਜੰਜਾਲ ॥੫੨॥

Jo upjiō so binas hai paro āj kai kāl.

Nānak Har gun gāe le chhād sagal janjāl.
Whatever is born shall perish—today or tomorrow. Therefore, sing the Divine virtues and abandon all entanglements.

ਦੋਹਰਾ ॥

Doharā.

(Couplet form)

੫੩

ਬਲੁ ਛੁਟਕਿਓ ਬੰਧਨ ਪਰੇ ਕਛੂ ਨ ਹੋਤ ਉਪਾਇ ॥
ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਅਬ ਓਟ ਹਰਿ ਗਜ ਜਿਉ ਹੋਹੁ ਸਹਾਇ ॥੫੩॥

Bal chhuṭkiō bandhan pare kachhū na hot upāe.
Kahu Nānak ab oṭ Har gaj jiu hohu sahāe.
When strength departs and one falls into bondage with no remedy left—O Nanak, then seek the shelter of the Divine, as the elephant once did.

੫੪

ਬਲੁ ਹੋਆ ਬੰਧਨ ਛੁਟੇ ਸਭੁ ਕਿਛੁ ਹੋਤ ਉਪਾਇ ॥
ਨਾਨਕ ਸਭੁ ਕਿਛੁ ਤੁਮਰੈ ਹਾਥ ਮੈ ਤੁਮ ਹੀ ਹੋਤ ਸਹਾਇ ॥੫੪॥

Bal hoā bandhan chhuṭe sabh kichh hot upāe.
Nānak sabh kichh tumrai hāth mai tum hī hot sahāe.
When strength returns and bonds are broken, all remedies seem possible. Yet all rests in Your Hands; You alone are the Helper.

੫੫

ਸੰਗ ਸਖਾ ਸਭਿ ਤਜਿ ਗਏ ਕੋਊ ਨ ਨਿਬਹਿਓ ਸਾਥਿ ॥
ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਇਹ ਬਿਪਤਿ ਮੈ ਟੇਕ ਏਕ ਰਘੁਨਾਥ ॥੫੫॥

Sang sakhā sabh taj gaye koū na nibahiō sāth.
Kahu Nānak ih bipat mai ṭek ek Raghunāth.
Companions and friends all depart; none remain faithful in crisis. In adversity, take refuge in the One alone.

੫੬

ਨਾਮੁ ਰਹਿਓ ਸਾਧੂ ਰਹਿਓ ਰਹਿਓ ਗੁਰੁ ਗੋਬਿੰਦੁ ॥
ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਇਹ ਜਗਤ ਮੈ ਕਿਨ ਜਪਿਓ ਗੁਰ ਮੰਤੁ ॥੫੬॥

Nām rahiō sādhū rahiō rahiō Gur Gobind.
Kahu Nānak ih jagat mai kin japiō Gur mant.
The Divine Name endures; the saint endures; the Guru-Gobind endures. But who in this world truly lives by the Guru's mantra?

੫੭

ਰਾਮ ਨਾਮੁ ਉਰ ਮੈ ਗਹਿਓ ਜਾ ਕੈ ਸਮ ਨਹੀ ਕੋਇ ॥
ਜਿਹ ਸਿਮਰਤ ਸੰਕਟ ਮਿਟੈ ਦਰਸੁ ਤੁਹਾਰੋ ਹੋਇ ॥੫੭॥੧

raam naam our mai gehiou jaa kai sam nehee koe ||
jih simarath sankatt mittai dharas thuhaaro hoe
I have enshrined the Lord's Name within my heart; there is nothing equal to it. Meditating in remembrance on it, my troubles are taken away; I have received the Blessed Vision of Your Darshan.

Glossary

Academic Freedom
The institutional principle that scholars should be able to pursue research, teaching, and intellectual inquiry without undue political, ideological, or administrative interference.
The book links academic freedom with **ethical formation**, arguing that authentic scholarly independence requires inner moral discernment rather than mere institutional protection.

Anthropological Instability
The condition in which the human self is experienced as internally conflicted, historically contingent, and susceptible to moral fragmentation.
The text presents anthropological instability as the **starting condition of the human person**, which the ethical pedagogy of the Salok seeks to address.

Anthropology
The interdisciplinary study of human beings in their biological, cultural, social, and symbolic dimensions.
The book situates its argument within a **philosophical anthropology**, examining the moral and existential condition of human beings.

Aphoristic Reflections
Concise philosophical or ethical statements intended to convey insight through compressed language and memorable formulation.
The Saloks are interpreted as **aphoristic reflections that encode a structured ethical pedagogy** rather than isolated poetic sayings.

Assimilated Moral Capacity
A deeply internalized ethical competence in which moral judgment becomes an integrated and stable disposition rather than a reaction to external rules.
The book argues that authentic ethical leadership emerges through **assimilation of moral capacities** such as discernment and detachment.

Atomistic Reading
An interpretive approach that treats textual elements as isolated units without recognizing their structural or conceptual interrelationships.
The book critiques atomistic readings of the Saloks and proposes instead a **coherent pedagogical structure** within the text.

Civilizational Responsibility
The ethical obligation to preserve and transmit the moral and intellectual foundations that sustain a civilization.
The work situates leadership formation within the broader horizon of **civilizational responsibility**, particularly in educational institutions.

Compliance Regimes
Institutional systems designed to enforce adherence to rules, policies, and regulatory standards.
The book contrasts compliance regimes with **inner ethical formation**, arguing that regulation alone cannot produce ethical leadership.

Detachment (Vairāg)
A disciplined state of inner freedom in which individuals remain unbound by ego, material desire, or social pressure, allowing ethical judgment to operate independently.
Vairāg represents the ethical stabilization of discernment, enabling leaders and individuals to act without being controlled by fear or attachment.

Devotional Aphorisms
Short poetic expressions combining spiritual devotion with ethical reflection.
The Saloks are treated as devotional aphorisms that simultaneously convey **spiritual insight and ethical instruction**.

Discernment (Bibek)
The cultivated intellectual and moral capacity to distinguish truth from illusion, ethical integrity from corruption, and authentic duty from self-interest.
Bibek marks the first stage of ethical awakening in the pedagogical structure of the Salok, enabling individuals to recognize the distortions created by fear and attachment.

Distortion
The disruption or misalignment of ethical perception caused by psychological, existential, or social forces that obscure moral clarity and authentic judgment.
Distortion represents the moral and perceptual disorientation that the Salok seeks to diagnose and correct. In the framework of the book, distortion primarily manifests through the forces of Kaal and Māyā.

Doctrinal Claim
A formally articulated proposition within a religious or ideological tradition asserting the validity of a particular teaching.
The book distinguishes between **doctrinal claims and ethical pedagogy**, focusing primarily on the latter.

Ego Relativization
The process through which the perceived centrality of the individual ego is reassessed within a broader ethical or spiritual framework.
Ego relativization is necessary for developing **detachment and moral independence**.

Egoic Control
The tendency of the ego to dominate perception and decision-making through attachment to power, status, or identity.
The book identifies egoic control as a **source of ethical distortion** in leadership.

Ethical Pedagogy
A structured method of cultivating moral awareness, judgment, and responsibility through reflective learning.
The central argument of the book is that the Salok Mahalla 9 functions as a **pedagogy of ethical formation**.

Ethical Sobriety
A reflective disposition toward moral judgment marked by restraint, prudence, and awareness of ethical complexity.
Ethical sobriety represents a mature stage of moral awareness that resists ideological simplification.

Existential
Pertaining to philosophical inquiry into the conditions of human existence, including freedom, responsibility, and meaning.
The book adopts an existential orientation in analysing human moral struggles.

Existential Anthropology
A philosophical approach that studies human beings in terms of lived experience, vulnerability, freedom, and meaning-making.
The work develops an **existential anthropology** grounded in the insights of the Salok.

Existential Clarity
A condition in which individuals clearly recognize the realities of human limitation, responsibility, and moral choice.
Existential clarity emerges through reflection on **human finitude and moral vulnerability**.

Existential Diagnosis
An interpretive framework analysing the moral and psychological condition of individuals or societies in terms of alienation and loss of meaning.
The book offers an existential diagnosis of **ethical disorientation in contemporary institutions**.

Existential Insight
A moment of reflective awareness in which fundamental aspects of human existence become evident with clarity.
The Saloks are interpreted as catalysts for existential insight leading to moral transformation.

External Enforcement
The imposition of ethical behaviour through rules, sanctions, or institutional authority.
The book argues that external enforcement alone cannot sustain ethical integrity.

External Imposition
Ethical norms or rules applied from outside the individual without internal acceptance.
The text contrasts external imposition with **internal ethical formation**.

Formed Capacity
A stable ethical ability cultivated through disciplined reflection and moral practice.
The book emphasizes leadership as a matter of **formed moral capacities** rather than technical competence.

Gurmat Ontology
The philosophical understanding of reality grounded in the teachings of the Sikh Gurus.
The book situates its ethical framework within the **ontological vision of Gurmat**.

Gurmat Worldview
The broader philosophical and ethical perspective derived from Sikh scriptural teachings.
The ethical pedagogy described in the book reflects the **Gurmat worldview of moral freedom through spiritual grounding**.

Hermeneutic Approach
A methodological framework concerned with interpreting texts through historical, linguistic, and conceptual analysis.
The book employs a hermeneutic approach to uncover the ethical structure of the Saloks.

Human Condition
The fundamental existential and ontological state of human beings characterized by finitude, vulnerability, moral uncertainty, and the continual

struggle between ethical responsibility and self-centered impulses.
The book begins with an examination of the human condition as the starting point of ethical inquiry, recognizing that human beings exist within conditions of fear, attachment, and moral ambiguity.

Human Finitude
The condition of human limitation, including mortality and restricted knowledge.
Awareness of human finitude forms the **existential background of ethical reflection**.

Illusion (Māyā)
The distortive power of attachment and misperception that obscures moral clarity.
Māyā is presented as one of the **central distortions of human perception** addressed in the text.

Inner Alignment
The harmonization of thought, intention, and action according to ethical and spiritual principles.
Inner alignment represents the **integration of discernment and detachment**.

Inner Anchoring
The internal stabilization of identity and ethical orientation through spiritual grounding.
Inner anchoring culminates in the **practice of Naam**.

Institutional Trust
The confidence that individuals place in institutions to act with fairness, integrity, and responsibility.
The book argues that institutional trust depends upon **ethically formed leadership**.

Internal Coherence
Logical and conceptual consistency within a philosophical or textual framework.
The book demonstrates the internal coherence of the Saloks as an ethical pedagogy.

Kaal
A conceptual representation of existential anxiety arising from the awareness of mortality, temporality, and vulnerability, which often drives individuals toward fear-based or self-protective behaviour.
In the book, Kaal symbolizes the distortion of human action driven by fear, especially the fear of loss, death, or insecurity, which frequently leads to ethical compromise.

Leadership Failure
The breakdown of ethical responsibility within positions of authority.
Leadership failure is interpreted as a consequence of **unresolved existential distortions**.

Liberation
Freedom from existential, moral, or psychological constraint achieved through ethical and spiritual transformation.
Liberation is understood as **moral freedom grounded in spiritual awareness**.

Māyā
The distortive condition of attachment to material possessions, social status, ego, or illusionary perceptions of permanence.
Māyā represents the second major source of ethical distortion, where attachment and desire cloud discernment and prevent moral clarity.

Methodological Scaffolding
The conceptual and analytical structure used to support systematic inquiry.
The book employs methodological scaffolding to guide the interpretation of the Saloks.

Moral Freedom
The condition in which individuals act according to ethical discernment and spiritual grounding rather than fear, attachment, or external compulsion.
Moral freedom represents the culmination of the ethical journey described in the book, emerging when discernment, detachment, and ontological anchoring are fully integrated.

Moral Vigilance
Continuous attentiveness to ethical responsibility.
Moral vigilance prevents the re-emergence of distortion and complacency.

Naam
The contemplative remembrance and internalization of the Divine reality that stabilizes moral consciousness.
Naam represents the **final ontological anchoring** that enables moral freedom.

Ontological Anchoring (Naam)
The grounding of human identity and moral orientation in a stable awareness of ultimate reality through contemplative remembrance of the Divine.
Naam serves as the spiritual foundation of ethical life, providing the inner steadiness necessary for sustained moral integrity.

Ontological Condition
The fundamental state of being that defines the nature of human existence.
The book examines the ontological condition of humanity as vulnerable yet capable of moral freedom.

Ontological Steadiness
A stable existential orientation grounded in spiritual awareness.
Ontological steadiness emerges from sustained spiritual discipline.

Pedagogical Funnel
A structured process in which learning moves from broad diagnosis toward focused ethical transformation.
The book interprets the Saloks as forming a pedagogical funnel leading toward moral freedom.

Philological Reading
Textual interpretation emphasizing linguistic and historical analysis.
The book integrates philological insights but moves beyond them toward ethical interpretation.

Philosophical Scaffolding
Conceptual structures that organize and support philosophical argumentation.
The book builds philosophical scaffolding to explain the ethical pedagogy of the Saloks.

Poetic Restraint
A disciplined use of language that conveys profound meaning through minimal expression.
The Saloks exhibit poetic restraint while carrying deep philosophical insight.

Policy Proliferation
The rapid multiplication of institutional regulations intended to control behaviour.
Policy proliferation is contrasted with **ethical interiorization**.

Procedural Accidents
Failures within systems caused by procedural complexity or unintended consequences.
The book suggests that ethical leadership reduces procedural accidents by strengthening moral judgment.

Random Anthology
A collection of texts lacking thematic or conceptual organization.
The book rejects the view that the Saloks constitute a random anthology.

Sectarian Expansion
The institutional growth of religious communities through boundary-reinforcing identity formation.
The book distinguishes its philosophical analysis from sectarian expansion.

Spiritual Anthropology
A philosophical understanding of human beings that integrates existential vulnerability with spiritual potential.
The work articulates a spiritual anthropology grounded in Gurmat thought.

Spiritual Conviction
A deeply internalized commitment to spiritual truth guiding ethical action.
Spiritual conviction strengthens moral courage in leadership contexts.

Spiritual Resolution
A deliberate commitment to orient life according to spiritual principles.
Spiritual resolution marks the transition toward ontological anchoring.

Sustainable Governance
Systems of leadership and administration capable of maintaining legitimacy and ethical integrity over time.
The book argues that sustainable governance depends on ethically formed leaders.

Sustained Engagement
Continuous intellectual and moral interaction with a text or tradition.
Sustained engagement with the Saloks reveals their deeper ethical architecture.

Thematic–Ethical Approach
An interpretive method focusing on recurring ethical themes within a text.
The book employs a thematic–ethical approach to reveal the pedagogical structure of the Saloks.

Unresolved Existential and Ontological Misalignment
A condition in which an individual's beliefs, identity, and ethical actions remain internally contradictory.
The book identifies this misalignment as a root cause of leadership failure.

Vairāg (Detachment)
A cultivated freedom from attachment to status, possession, and ego.
Vairāg enables leaders to act ethically without fear or desire for reward.

ਬਲੁ ਹੋਆ ਬੰਧਨ ਛੁਟੇ ਸਭੁ ਕਿਛੁ ਹੋਤ ਉਪਾਇ ॥
ਨਾਨਕ ਸਭੁ ਕਿਛੁ ਤੁਮਰੈ ਹਾਥ ਮੈ ਤੁਮ ਹੀ ਹੋਤ ਸਹਾਇ ॥੫੪॥

Bal hoā bandhan chhuṭe sabh kichh hot upāe.
Nānak sabh kichh tumrai hāth mai tum hī hot sahāe.

"When strength returns and bonds are broken, all remedies seem possible.
Nanak, everything is in Your hands; You alone are the Helper."
(Guru Granth Sahib, Mahalla 9, Salok 54, Page 1429)

Can 17th-century spiritual wisdom navigate the complexities of modern institutional governance?

In *From Impermanence to Freedom*, Dr. Kawal Jeet Singh explores the profound "pedagogical architecture" of the fifty-seven Saloks of Guru Tegh Bahadur. While traditionally viewed through a devotional lens, this work re-imagines these verses as a rigorous framework for **Ethical Leadership Formation** within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

The author identifies a transformative "**Pedagogical Funnel**" that guides the administrator through four critical stages of internal development:

Existential Diagnosis: Confronting Kaal (Time) and the fragility of worldly power.
The Trap of Illusion: Identifying how Māyā distorts administrative clarity.
Moral Discernment: Cultivating Bibek and Vairāg to act with integrity.
Spiritual Resolution: Achieving freedom through Naam, shifting from ego-centric governance to selfless service.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Kawal Jeet Singh is a scholar and administrator dedicated to the intersection of Sikh philosophy and contemporary leadership. His work focuses on how the ethical dimensions of the Gurmat tradition can inform and elevate the structures of modern Higher Education Administration.